

MARK BOWDEN: WHY U.S. FIGHTER JOCKS ARE LOSING THEIR EDGE

the Atlantic

MARCH 2009 THEATLANTIC.COM

God, Grace & Gay Sex

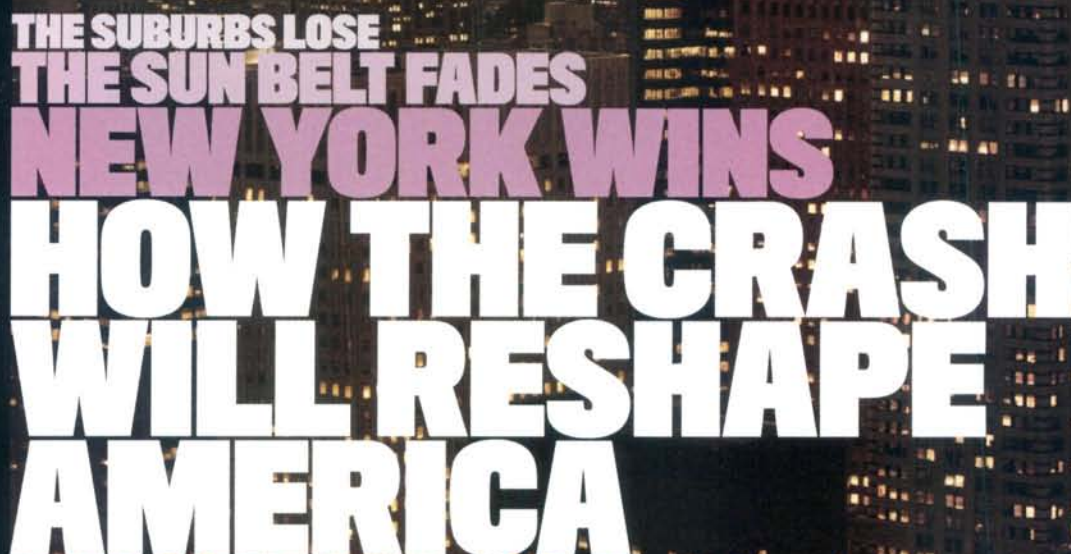
BY PAUL ELIE

Can Guitar Hero Save Rock?

BY JAMES PARKER

The Future of TV: Even Cheesier!

BY MICHAEL HIRSCHORN



**THE SUBURBS LOSE
THE SUN BELT FADES
NEW YORK WINS
HOW THE CRASH
WILL RESHAPE
AMERICA**

BY RICHARD FLORIDA

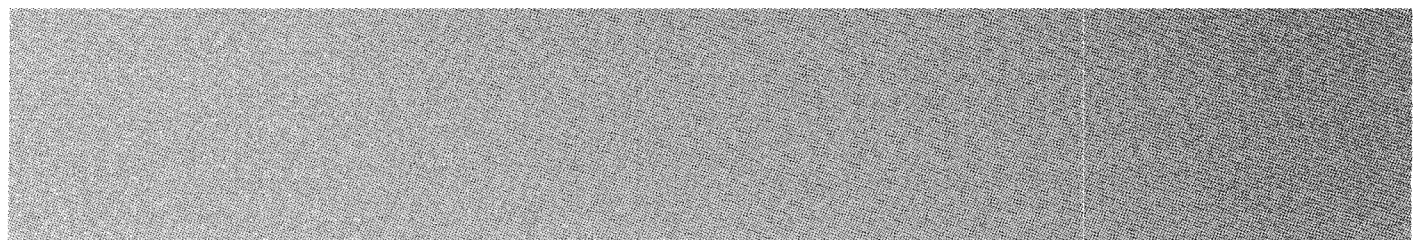
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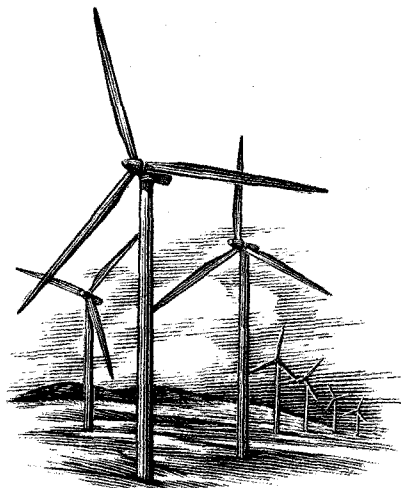
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the Atlantic

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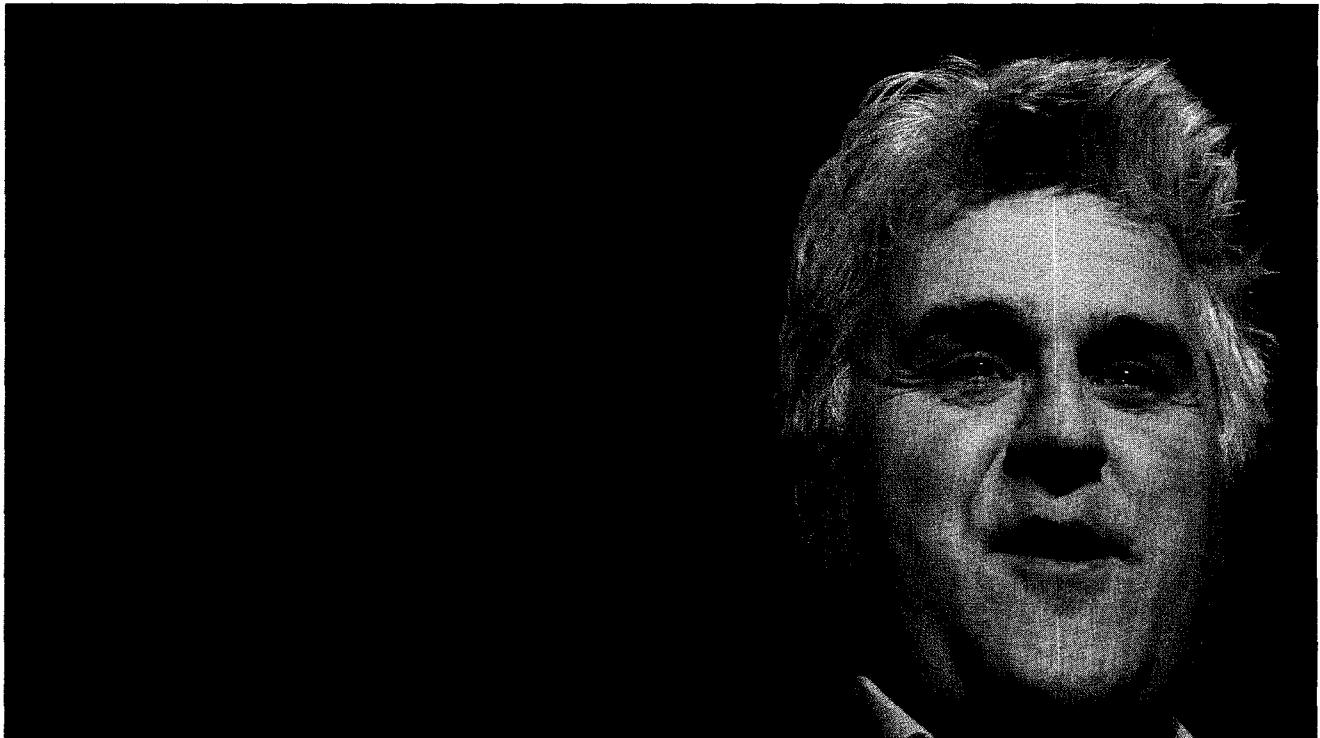
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INTERACTIVE

Read All About It: The Expanded Atlantic

The Atlantic introduces two new sites to its online lineup: a business section edited by Megan McArdle and a political hub overseen by Marc Ambinder. Both will offer staff commentary, analysis from outside experts, roundups of content from around the Web, and expanded interactive discussion.



VIDEO

The Making of an Ace

Pilots at Alaska's Elmendorf Air Force Base discuss the strategic role of the F-22, and what it takes to fly a jet.



INTERVIEW

A Flock Divided

Paul Elie talks about Archbishop Rowan Williams's balancing act, and the schisms threatening the Anglican Church.



INTERVIEW

Reversals of Fortune

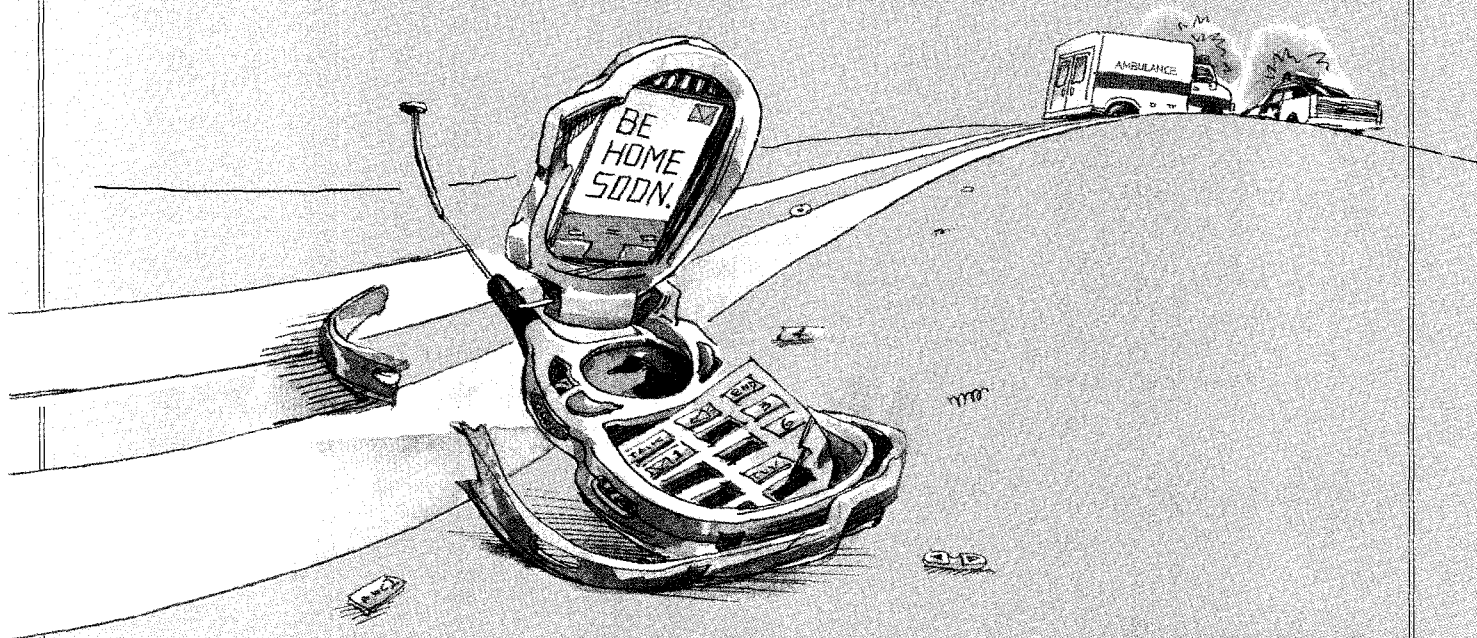
Richard Florida predicts the winners and losers of the economic meltdown, and explains how the American map will be redrawn.

LUCAS JACKSON/REUTERS/CORBIS

Nearly one third of teens admit to texting while driving.



SOME OF THEM WILL NEVER BE HEARD FROM AGAIN.



Car crashes are the leading cause of death among American teens. **Is any text message worth that risk?**

A recent survey showed that teens consider texting while driving to be extremely distracting. Texting not only takes their minds off the road but also takes their hands off the wheel.

Allstate has a few ideas to help curb the epidemic:

USE THE LAW.

Support state legislation banning digital distractions. The State of California has now banned anyone under the age of 18 from using cell phones, laptop computers, pagers or any text-messaging device while driving.

STRENGTHEN GRADUATED DRIVER LICENSING (GDL) LAWS.

GDL laws put limitations on teen driving so kids can gain experience safely. Since North Carolina

implemented one of the most comprehensive GDL laws in the country, it has seen a 25% decline in crashes involving 16-year-olds.

HAVE THE DRIVING TALK.

75% of teens surveyed said their parents would be the best influence in getting them to drive more safely. The Allstate Parent-Teen Driving Contract can help start the conversation. **Contact an Allstate Agent to get a copy or visit Allstate.com/teen for the interactive contract.**

Let's help teens realize the importance of giving the road their undivided attention.

It's time to make the world a safer place to drive.
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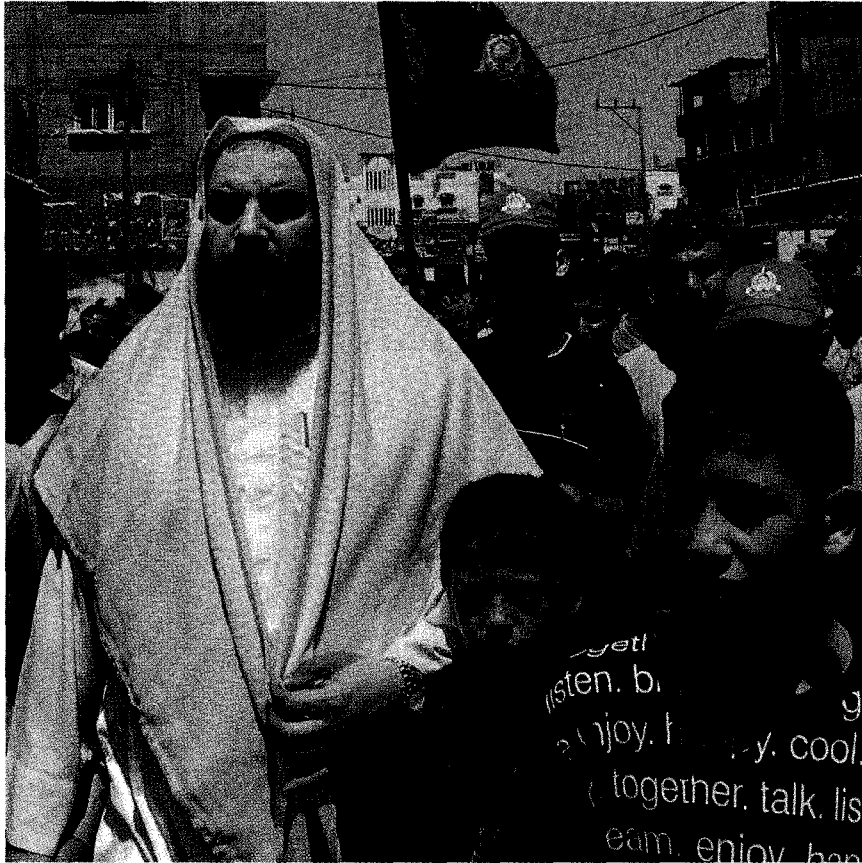
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EDITOR'S NOTE



Beyond Belief

ONCE, AS THE second intifada was nearing its height, I met with a Hamas man in a Gaza City hotel to talk about suicidal killing. He had written his master's thesis on martyrdom, before turning to the future of Islam for his doctorate, and he brought his Toshiba laptop along to call up verses from the Koran to bolster his end of the conversation. He had unusual, chilling credibility on the subject: unlike other Hamas leaders, he had actually sent one of his own children to his death, in an attack on an Israeli settlement. He was a mountain of a man, with a sly sense of humor, and I always suspected he was one of Hamas's deadlier manipulators of the young.

When I mentioned that my wife had come with me to Gaza, where I was reporting for *The New York Times*, he insisted I call her down from our room. She was then almost eight months

pregnant with our first child. To demonstrate how cosmopolitan he was, he made a point of shaking her hand, though in theory, Islam prohibits a man from touching a woman to whom he isn't related.

I kept thinking of this surreal encounter—my very pregnant wife, the courtly Hamas leader, the talk of deadly, suicidal children—when news came in January that Israel had killed the Hamas man, Nizar Rayyan, by dropping a bomb on his house in the Jabaliya refugee camp. With an intrepid *Times* colleague, Taghreed El-Khodary, I had met with him a few times in that house. Though we would ask about religion, he used to insist that he believed in fighting Israel purely for reasons to do with this world, not the next. His family had become refugees in the Israeli-Arab war of 1948, and though he had never lived there himself, he wanted to reclaim his ancestral home in what is now Ashkelon, in Israel.

He had a sure command of the legitimate grievances of his people,

and he was as skilled a sophist as any of the other Hamas leaders. "If we had weapons like the Israelis," he told me, "we would kill them in a way that is acceptable to Americans. But if we only have this poor man's bomb, what do you expect us to do?" To him, suicide bombings were valuable, not just because they could kill Israelis but because they confounded the unbelieving world, signaling "that we no longer love this life."

"It's normal that a human being will be scared of something mysterious," he said.

That day at the hotel, he wore a dark-green suit, white shirt, and blue-and-gold tie held in place by a silver clip. We drank juice, I think—he had an affectation of delicately sticking out one pinkie when he held a glass in his big hand—as he patiently tried to explain the Koranic basis for suicide killing. "I'm worried you don't understand," he said.

Rayyan said that he missed the son who had died attacking the settlement (he was 16), but that he planned to push another son to conduct an attack of his own. "It's our home," he said. "It's more dear to me than my kids." He was then looking to add a fourth wife—"I love women," he told me with a smile—with a goal of eventually having 50 children. His bigoted worldview, and his rich historical imagination, gave him a kind of serenity. "When Muslims ruled the world, we treated everyone as we treat ourselves," he said. To him, Israel was a hammer the Americans used to fragment Muslim society. Matter-of-factly, he told me once that the Palestinians might have to sacrifice half the rising generation to drive the Israelis out and rule all Palestine again.

He wound up sacrificing most of his own family. His four wives and nine of his children died in the January bombing, buried in the rubble of the house he insisted wasn't their real home. Several of his neighbors died, too. Outside of a prison, you are unlikely ever to meet someone more trapped than a Gazan refugee—by leaders like Rayyan, by Israel, by a fatal obsession with the past. ■

—James Bennet

MARCO LONGARI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



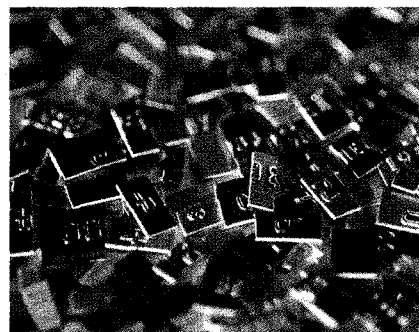
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



HIGH SPIRITS?

Fernet Branca ("The Bitter Beginning," November *Atlantic*) has been used in my family as far back as I can remember (I'm 90). There was nothing better to cure a sore tummy, indigestion, or cramps.

For a long time, it was not available. My daughter worked for a liquor distributor and she couldn't get any. She found out the reason it wasn't on the market: the original recipe contained opium. No wonder you felt so good after taking it, and no wonder the "new" version doesn't live up to the old stuff.

GENE BOGGIATTO
CASTROVILLE, CALIF.

Wayne Curtis replies:

For reasons too obvious for elaboration, the history of spirits and cocktails generates much intriguing, if unsubstantiated, lore. Representatives of Fratelli Branca "would not deny" the opium claims, but neither would they confirm them. Nor did they have any opinion on Fernet Branca's contributions to longevity.

BUBBLE BURST

Henry Blodget blows his analysis of "Why Wall Street Always Blows It" (December *Atlantic*) by using the word *bubble* 29 times to explain how my clients, friends, and family have recently lost hard-earned money.

Deflation is an unprecedented, non-cyclical problem, which is why interest rates at the Bank of England are at their lowest level not in five or 10 years but in more than 300. Investors in the Japanese market enjoyed a bubble a generation ago, but their "lost decade" stemmed in large part from an unprecedented demographic environment. Investors in emerging markets have not suffered

another round of cyclical exuberance about the thieving skills of populist dictatorships; instead, emerging markets finally "emerged" with fiscal conservatism, liberal free trade, competitive production, and vast savings just as the U.S. savings rate approached subzero—which caused unprecedented dislocations for everyone. Even in the United States, hundred-year-old industrial companies are on their deathbeds, not because of a cyclical downturn after an "SUV mania" but as a result of relentless and noncyclical phenomena (e.g., globalization, deunionization, a broken health-care system).

In this meltdown, many efforts at long-term investing have been rudely interrupted by short-term, leveraged noise and stupidity, but we need a broader analysis to understand why leaders of some of the world's august capitalist institutions are begging for bailouts. This may be the start of a broader realignment of capital that is not cyclical.

SOLOMON M. KARMEL, PH.D.
FINANCIAL PLANNER AND BRANCH
MANAGER, FIRST ALLIED SECURITIES
BELLEVUE, WASH.

Henry Blodget wants us to believe that we're all equally responsible for the current financial crisis. That's nonsense. He concludes that if we just "save more, spend less, diversify our investments, and avoid buying things we can't afford," we'll learn from our mistakes. Funny, I, like millions of others, did exactly that.

Except for a mortgage with a significant down payment, I never borrowed a dime, always bought cars with cash and drove them into the ground, and followed a conservative diversified investment strategy promoted by Blodget's former employer, Merrill Lynch. The payoff for this good behavior is a loss in net worth that I'll probably never recover in my lifetime.

FRANK DROBOT
LOS ALTOS, CALIF.

Henry Blodget replies:

There is no rigorous definition of the term bubble. I have used it loosely to describe situations in which prices soar to previously unfathomable heights and then collapse, revealing even

the most sophisticated explanations for the booms to have been comically stupid.

It may be, as Solomon Karmel suggests, that the U.S. is now in a noncyclical decline, and that this is what caused the collapse. I think it's more likely that history is just repeating itself, and that we'll now go through a multidecade period of paying for our debt binge, as we did after the 1920s. Given the rise of Asia, I agree that it is indeed unlikely that we'll ever again have as much power in the world—economically or militarily—as we did in the last decades of the 20th century.

As to the wisdom of diversification: if my former employer, Merrill Lynch, recommended that Frank Drobot limit his borrowing and diversify his portfolio among multiple asset classes, this was a sound strategy. It can't prevent losses—no investment strategy can—but it's still

Log

MOST-RESPONDED-
TO PIECES OF 2008:

1. "Shooting Britney"
David Samuels, April
2. "In the Basement
of the Ivory Tower"
Professor X, June
3. "Is Google
Making Us Stupid?"
Nicholas Carr,
July/August
4. "Marry Him!"
Lori Gottlieb, March
5. "Unforgiven"
Jeffrey Goldberg, May

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BANKING ON CHINA

Banker Gao Xiqing's candor ("Be Nice to the Countries That Lend You Money," December *Atlantic*) is refreshing, but his model of treating financial derivatives as mirrors seems precisely wrong. Mirrors transmit information about objects without transmitting their substance. Derivatives do the opposite, delivering the substance—risks and all—of their underlying assets without information that might inspire caution or provoke regulation. Real-estate agents to mortgage brokers, brokers to banks, banks to Wall Street, and on to insurers—every derivative step obscures risk; none reflects it.

Instead of mirrors, I see derivatives as shipping containers crammed with poorly labeled goods from loosely regulated factories and forwarded by dubious intermediaries. Trade remains brisk as long as the risks inside—lead paint, melamine additives, or time-bomb mortgages—go unacknowledged. But it takes only a glimpse of scandal or whisper of doubt to bring the edifice down.

PATRICK MULVANNY
PACIFICA, CALIF.

James Fallows replies:

Patrick Mulvanny's point is a good one. While I obviously cannot speak for Gao Xiqing, I imagine that if he were sitting down with Mulvanny he would instantly recognize the technical superiority of the shipping-container analogy, which vividly conveys the danger that excessive use of derivatives can pose to the financial system. ("There could be a powerful bomb inside one box—but you would have no idea from the outside!")

But when Gao used the mirror analogy, he was trying to convey the most basic idea of how derivatives worked to a council of senior Chinese Communist Party leaders with virtually no financial experience, at a time when China's financial markets had been operating for barely 10 years. Under the circumstances, it seems a forgivable simplification. And if he sees this exchange, I bet he will adopt the container analogy as his own.

DEBT NATION

Virginia Postrel ("The Case for Debt," November *Atlantic*) selectively ignores the economic reality facing American families today. The personal-savings rate has been steadily decreasing for more than 20 years, becoming negative in 2005 for the first time since the Great Depression and hovering close to zero since then. At the same time, the debt-service ratio (the ratio of debt payments to personal disposable income) has increased to 15 percent. Real wages have been relatively flat since 2001, growing by only 4 percent since 1999, while outstanding credit-card debt has grown by more than 75 percent. And a recent survey conducted by the public-policy organization Demos of low- and middle-income Americans found that the main reason for carrying a revolving credit balance was the loss of a job, or a medical expense, car repair, or other basic necessity.

Furthermore, Postrel's assertion that credit is cheaper now fails to recognize that for low- and middle-income credit-card holders, the high cost of late fees and penalties can trap families in debt. All the major issuers now raise a cardholder's interest rate to a "default rate" when their payment arrives late, often to 30 or even 34 percent. Issuers also charge the consumer a late fee.

Credit cards may be a cheaper option than payday loans and pawnshops, as Postrel states, but credit-card companies should not profit from families just trying to make ends meet.

JOSÉ A. GARCÍA
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF
POLICY AND RESEARCH, ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM
NEW YORK, N.Y.

Virginia Postrel replies:

By suggesting that financially strapped consumers would be better off without access to credit, José García repeats a common fallacy in the century-old litany

of complaints about consumer debt. The problem is not credit. It is poverty. If you don't have money to get your car fixed or pay your doctor, even high-priced credit is a godsend. (It's worth noting that the forms of credit traditionally used by

lower-income people—pawnshops, rent-to-own stores, and loans from friends and family—do not show up in aggregate statistics on consumers' savings or debt.)

As I said in the column, credit-card prices used to be "high and simple," with everyone paying the same, regardless of credit risk. Now people who reliably pay their bills no longer cross-subsidize higher-risk customers—which

arguably makes pricing fairer—and people who used to be too risky for standard pricing can get credit cards. But the fees and interest rates that García complains about are one result. They represent the real cost of making those loans. As we've recently learned from the mortgage market, underpriced credit can prove terribly expensive in the long run.

The best argument against consumer credit is that its easy availability tempts people into buying things they later regret, not that credit-card companies make profits by lending to risky borrowers who need their services. The latter complaint is just a 21st-century form of the ancient attack on money lending.

CORRECTION

"Race Over?" (January/February *Atlantic*) incorrectly stated that Pastor Anthony Evans of the Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas, attempted to secure money to help turn out the vote for Barack Obama. He did not do so. Dr. Evans did not campaign or canvass on behalf of Barack Obama, and had no contact with the Obama campaign on such matters before the election. We regret the error.

To submit a letter to the editor, please e-mail us at letters@theatlantic.com. Include your full name, city, and state.

DEFENSE

Ghosts in the Machine

Uncle Sam is losing the war in cyberspace. In the past few years, the defense secretary's e-mail was hacked, the State Department lost terabytes of information, and both Homeland Security and NASA suffered serious foreign cyber attacks. But the most pressing threat is economic: foreign competitors are stealing billions of dollars' worth of U.S. military technology and intellectual property.

—“Securing Cyberspace for the 44th Presidency,” Center for Strategic and International Studies

MARKETING

Dupes for Detail

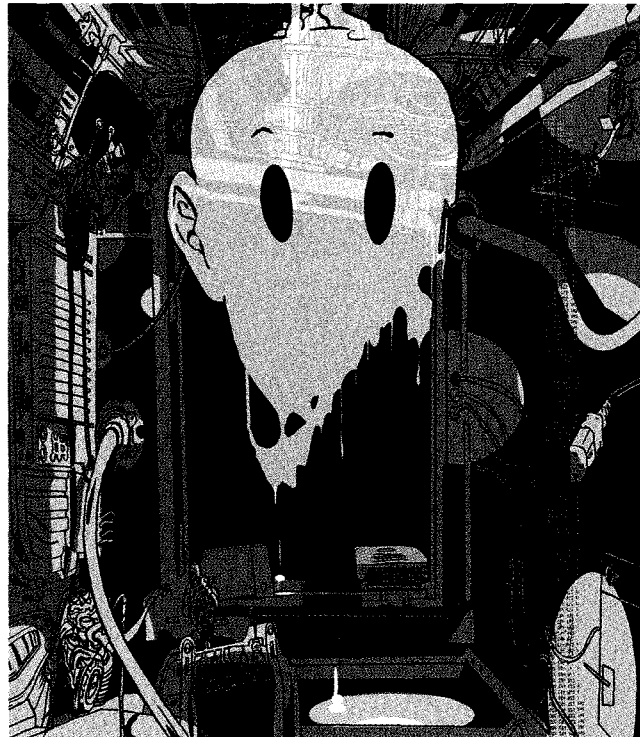
Do you know what a megapixel is, or what horsepower measures? Consumers are irresistibly drawn to product specifications—from the “distortion rate” of a stereo to the calories in a snack—even when the numbers mean nothing to them. In fact, given a chance to directly experience competing products, buyers are still more likely to just pick the item with impressive-sounding features on the package, even if it's more expensive.

—“Specification Seeking: How Product Specifications Influence Consumer Preference,” Journal of Consumer Research

GOVERNANCE

Black-Market Efficiency

One cure for a country beset by government bureaucracy and incompetence may be some old-fashioned corruption. In countries with robust institutions,



corruption decreases efficiency. But in weak states, graft and bribes can “grease the wheels” by enabling intelligent investors to circumvent a crooked, incapable government and invest money directly in the private sector.

—“Is Corruption an Efficient Grease?,” Bank of Finland

PSYCHOLOGY

Close Encounters

Green men, spaceships, all that probing—why do alien-abduction stories always sound the same? Possibly because the abductees share an abnormal psychological profile. Unsurprisingly,

“experiencers” are apt to believe in the paranormal.

But they're also more likely to hallucinate, lose themselves in vivid fantasies,

experience dissociation, and suffer from sleep paralysis—a condition between sleep and wakefulness that seems to trigger supposed abductions.

—“Psychological Aspects of the Alien Contact Experience,” Cortex

AGRICULTURE

Yields of Dreams

Are we finally in for a Malthusian reckoning? Despite advances in pesticides, fertilizers, and breeding, agriculture has “barely kept pace” with a booming population, leaving 14 percent of the world underfed. Without a major technological leap, this will mean extreme food shortages in the next 40 years as the world population surpasses 9 billion. As a result, genetically modified crops may soon become a necessity: yields of bioengineered U.S. corn will increase more than 40 percent in the next four

decades—far faster than those of low-tech crops.

—“Revisiting Malthus in Light of Agricultural Biotechnology,” University of Georgia

SOCIETY

Morality Bites

Most high-school students have lied to their teachers, and nearly two-thirds have cheated on tests. One-third admitted to Internet-assisted plagiarism, and 82 percent to copying another's work. In fact, the study itself fell victim to teenage dishonesty: 26 percent of respondents said they lied on at least one question. Ninety-three percent said they had good ethics.

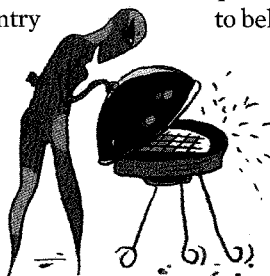
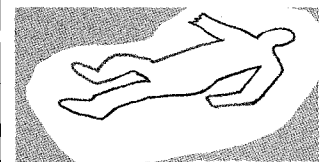
—“Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth,” Josephson Institute

SECURITY

The Civic Assassin

Who needs the Secret Service? Politicians fearing assassins could just do a better job, or delegate more: increased government accountability, political stability, a larger cabinet, and decentralized power all diminish assassination attempts by reducing the incentive to murder a single politician to effect executive change. This helps explain why politicians in the decentralized Swiss system—who generally have no security and take public transit—are never assassinated, while Hitler faced some 40 attempts on his life.

—“Politicians: Be Killed or Survive,” CESifo Working Paper



essential₂ reuse

recyclable materials

American chemistry helps engineer the technologies that make it possible for plastics to be recycled, such as creating new decking made out of recycled materials. And we're working to increase recycling through public partnerships and consumer education.

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DISPATCHES

THE MILITARY Brian Mockenhaupt on what combat vets can learn from Sophocles

CONSUMPTION Alexandra Harney explains why the Japanese, of all people, are shunning luxury brands.

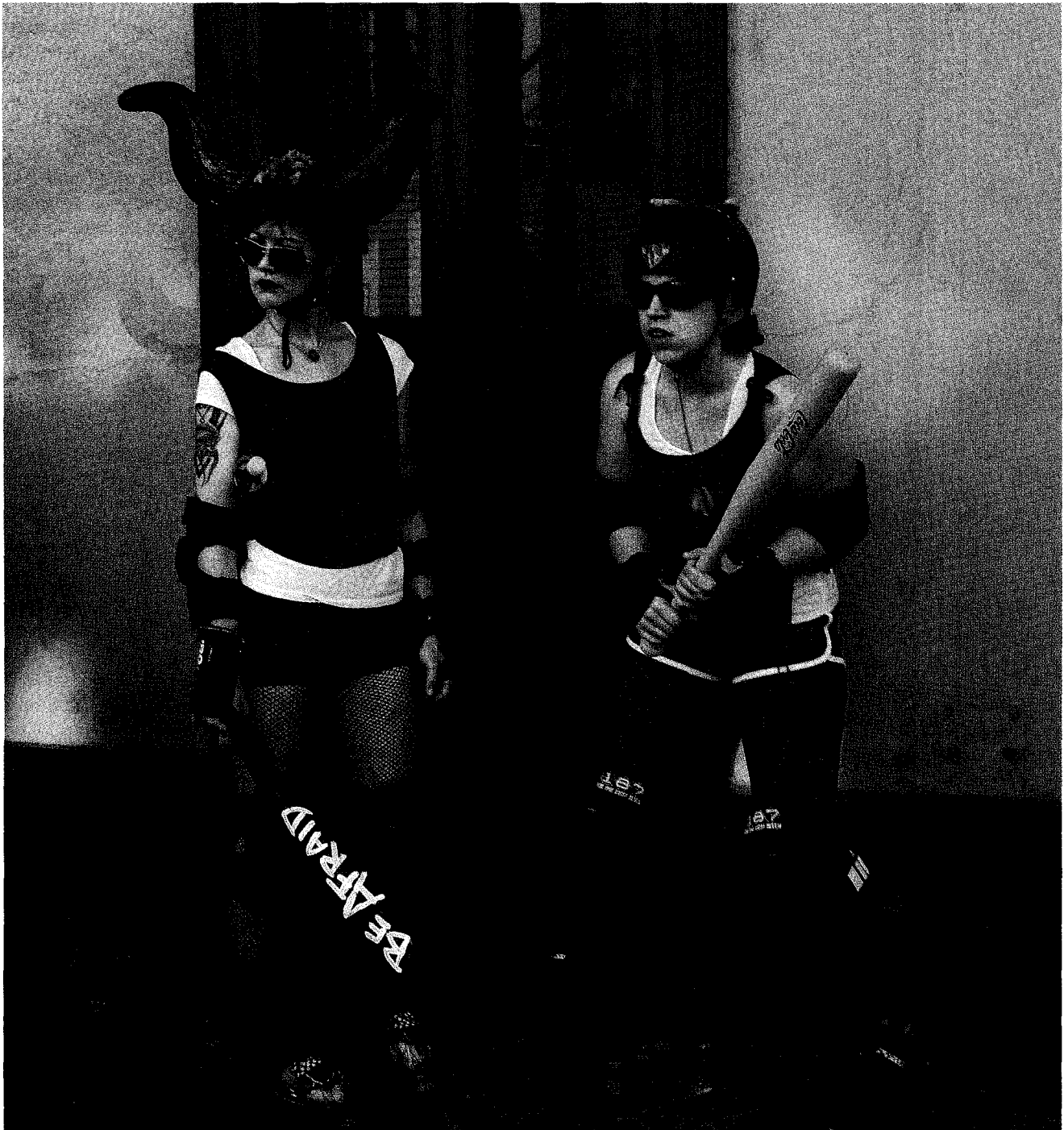
REAL ESTATE Matthew Quirk patrols the front lines of the foreclosure crisis.

LIVES James Fallows meets the godfather of Beijing's music scene.

FOOD Corby Kummer laments the lost opportunities of the cupcake craze.

TRAVEL Wayne Curtis runs with the bulls in New Orleans.

TECHNOLOGY Luke O'Brien on how to keep your water safe from drugs, dirt, and intersexual fish



WAYNE CURTIS

In New Orleans, bulls wear hats. And roller skates.



THE MILITARY

Tragic Heroes

WHAT TODAY'S VETERANS
CAN LEARN FROM TALES
OF THE TROJAN WAR

By Brian Mockenhaupt

SPIT FLIES FROM the wounded soldier's mouth and his face pulses, red. "Death! Where are you?" roars Philoctetes, played by the actor Paul Giamatti. "Why, after all these years of calling, have you not appeared?" About 200 military mental-health experts watched him spiral into despair as they worked their way through box lunches, squeezed into a suburban-D.C. hotel conference room. "Earth, swallow this body whole, receive me just as I am, for I can't stand it any longer," he moans, breathless. "I am wretched, afflicted, and alone."

Sophocles wrote these words 2,400 years ago when he inventoried the maladies of combat veterans in his plays *Philoctetes* and *Ajax*, which recount two Greek soldiers' anguish during

the Trojan War. Now the Theater of War project has revived these ancient stories, with a plain message for today's veterans: your experiences are timeless. For as long as men have fought one another, they surely have been psychologically damaged by it. The diagnosis has changed over the years—shell shock, battle fatigue, combat stress, and now post-traumatic stress disorder—but the consequences have remained constant: anger, isolation, guilt, grief, helplessness, and, at the most extreme, wrecked families and suicide.

Most of the many recent plays and films about Iraq and Afghanistan have failed commercially. But the Sophocles readings target a much narrower audience. Director Bryan Doerries has shown his production to five military audiences since August and hopes to expand its reach and perform regularly for returning troops. "I would like to see these plays used to destigmatize psychological injury," he said.

Indeed, overcoming stigma has been the Pentagon's trickiest problem in treating PTSD in recent combat veterans, who are trained to suppress

discomfort and focus on the mission, and who have difficulty acknowledging mental damage and asking for assistance. The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury invited Doerries to its November conference, a brainstorming session on ways to make soldiers more resilient in the face of combat and encourage them to seek help. *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* have much to say about both.

"War is war is war is war, and hasn't changed in 3,000 years," psychiatrist Jonathan Shay told me. He has treated Vietnam veterans for 20 years and has written two books comparing contemporary soldiers' experiences—both in combat and at home—to those of the men in Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. For the Athenians, Shay said, theater served as a bridge between the battlefield and civil society, a mix of therapy, purification, and reintegration. Communalizing combat trauma, he argued, can help heal it, making recovery a shared experience. I would have liked to see these plays when I came home from Iraq, not for insights on leaving the battlefield and reintegrating into old lives, but for commiseration and context in a disorienting moment, when I had more in common with soldiers two millennia dead than with people I passed on sidewalks.

"Our fierce hero sits shell-shocked in his tent, glazed over, gazing into oblivion," says Ajax's wife, Tecmessa, played by the actress Elizabeth Marvel, of *Burn After Reading*. "He started to make these low sounds, the kind I never thought I'd hear him make, for he always told his men that crying was for women and cowards." Ajax won fame in the Trojan War as a feared warrior, but he spirals into a rage when his generals give the slain Achilles' armor to his rival, Odysseus. Ajax plots to kill his superiors, but the gods intervene, and Ajax instead mistakenly slaughters a field of cows and sheep. The shame overwhelms him. "Do you see what I've done?" the Broadway actor Bill Camp wails. "I've killed these harmless barnyard animals with my hands. What a joke my life has become, my reputation, my sense of honor!" Beyond consolation, Ajax plunges the hilt of his sword into the ground and falls upon the blade.

JON KRAUSE

While *Ajax* bears warnings about the failure to seek help and the potential impotence of caregivers, *Philoctetes* delivers a measure of hope. The eponymous hero lays bare his anguish and loneliness and asks his comrades for aid. They take him into their care, delivering him from his isolation and pain. War will damage minds, but the severity and the duration of psychological wounds can be contained when help is provided and sought. Otherwise, we have *Ajax*, dead upon his sword. ■

Brian Mockenhaupt is a fellow at the Alicia Patterson Foundation and a former infantryman.

CONSUMPTION

Sayonara, Prada

WHY JAPAN'S YOUNG CONSUMERS ARE TURNING AWAY FROM LUXURY GOODS

By Alexandra Harney

AT THE 109 shopping mall in trendy Shibuya, saleswomen in ruffled mini-skirts shout their welcome in sticky-sweet tones above a din of club music. Japanese girls with clouds of strawberry-blond curls and heavy fake eyelashes cruise the mall's 10 floors, shopping bags dangling from their wrists.

The 109 building is the epicenter of under-25 Japanese fashion, and it has everything a girl could want—terry-cloth hot pants, argyle sweaterdresses, rhinestone-studded skull rings—all at deep discounts to department-store prices. Everything, that is, except luxury brands. A Prada purse is as rare a sight here as a pair of sensible shoes.

Why are young Japanese women, who as recently as a decade ago were sometimes turning to prostitution to finance their Louis Vuitton habits, losing their lust for foreign luxury brands?

"I've never bought anything from a luxury brand, so I really wouldn't know," laughed Mika Urasawa, a 20-year-old assistant at the 109 shop Rose Fan Fan, as she helped me into a puffy black jacket with fake-fur trim. "If I bought something from one of those brands, I'd probably spend a fortune on it and a year later it'd be out of fashion anyway."

I had come to 109 at the invitation of Keiko Sakurai, a 28-year veteran of

Chanel's Japanese operations. Slim, with a bell of black hair, Sakurai had lately made it her mission to understand just what is going on with the Japanese consumer.

Luxury brands are concerned, to put it mildly, about what's happening in Japan. Japanese shoppers, at home and abroad, account for about half of the global luxury-goods market. But according to a study released last fall by Bain & Company, the luxury market here was expected to shrink by 7 percent in 2008, after falling by 2 percent the previous year.

Part of the problem is plain old economics—a sharp contraction following prolonged economic stagnation. Last year, Japanese department stores posted their 12th consecutive year of declining sales. Responding to the dog years of the 1990s and the bursting of the tech bubble, many Japanese companies have replaced full-time workers with temporary ones. In 2007, nearly 40 percent of Japanese workers were employed in non-staff (contract or part-time) positions, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare. A growing proportion of young people once blessed with steady incomes are now "freeters," people who float from job to job.

These circumstances are prompting deeper behavioral shifts. In a country renowned for its after-work drinking, for example, 34 percent of the 20-somethings surveyed by the *Nikkei Marketing Journal* in 2007 said they never or hardly ever drank alcohol. The same poll found that the number of

Japanese in their 20s who were saving money "to prepare for the future" had doubled between 2000 and 2007.

Sakurai and other observers believe Japanese people have changed their attitude toward luxury consumption. In the bubble years of the 1980s and early 1990s, many Japanese aspired to own the same Western brands—not to stand out, but rather to fit in. Some 40 percent of Japanese consumers reportedly own a product from Louis Vuitton, whose parent company derives almost 10 percent of its revenue from Japan.

The collapse of the bubble economy in Japan and the "lost decade" of decline that followed left everyone a little wiser. "Japanese consumers were like a sponge," Chanel's Sakurai told me. "We absorbed everything, and then we got wrung out. We're not going to absorb the same things as we used to." What sells today is value. When the Swedish discount fashion retailer H&M opened its first Japanese outlet in September, more than 5,000 people waited on line.

Today, "it's not about how much money you have," Sakurai said. "It's about expressing your own personal style."

For young Japanese, as for youth everywhere, the more that personal style differs from their parents', the better. Junpei Kosaka, a 26-year-old advertising executive, can afford to buy luxury brands but chooses not to. Brands like Armani, he sniffs, are "for rich old dandies." ■

Alexandra Harney is the author of The China Price.



REAL ESTATE

Cops and Squatters

ON THE FORECLOSURE BEAT
IN SAN BERNARDINO

By Matthew Quirk

IF YOU ANTICIPATE being shot at after you knock on a door, it's best to hang back near the knob, just outside the doorframe, a position that makes the angles all wrong for whoever may greet you. That's where supervising code-enforcement officer Robert Houts and I stood, early on a hot November day in San Bernardino, California. Houts and his partner, Mike Jiles, were checking "open and vacant" houses—unsecured foreclosures perfect for homesteading. This one was a two-bedroom gray bungalow, a recent foreclosure, now covered in gang tags. Houts pointed to a rectangular cut, about the size of a lighter, in the screen door.

"Is that how they broke in?" I asked.

No. The hole was most likely for making exchanges. Houts suspected this was a drug house. He pointed out a tiny empty baggie on the stoop. "Probably meth."

In the back, someone had thrown a blanket over a surrounding chain-link fence and forced open the rear door—the squatters' main entrance. Jiles waited there to catch any "bodies" that Houts flushed out.

Houts pounded on the front door. "City of San Bernardino! If you're in here, please show yourself!" He banged

on the window and yelled again. No response.

We started working our way along the rest of the empty homes on the block, flushing one squatter out of a yellow house farther down the street. We caught a glimpse of him over a fence, but by the time we got there, he was gone. A plastic bag filled with human feces lay near the back stoop—a far more considerate approach to waste management than we found in the other squats.

Squatters tend to scatter before the morning rousts, and sneak back into the houses after dark. Many spend their days scrounging metal to sell to a scrapyard, leaving long jagged tears on the inside walls of houses where they have torn wiring out through the wallboard. After the city tried to stymie metal thieves by banning the use of shopping carts (the main conveyance for scrap) off store premises, scavengers just switched to baby carriages, some stolen from porches.

At every house, Houts examined the meters for signs of hijacked utilities, checking whether "the electric fairy" had stopped by. Where the officers found someone inside, they would issue a citation. Where they found an open foreclosure, they'd post a notice that it needed to be boarded up and otherwise brought up to code. Then they'd spend hours in the office untangling the skeins of the subprime mess, trying to identify and contact whoever was responsible for the dwelling. If the owners did nothing in response, as often happened, the city would board it up. "The banks are just waiting to get bailed out," Houts said.

Once home to frenzied McMansion building, the Inland Empire, as the surrounding landlocked region is known, now has, by some measures, the worst foreclosure rates in the nation. "There's one, there's one, there's one," Jiles pointed out the bank-owned properties as we drove: a half-dozen on one block. Twelve percent of the houses in San Bernardino are in foreclosure. In one ward, it's 21 percent. Downtown's squatter problem is particularly bad, though no community or neighborhood is immune. Sophisticated scamsters can blend in and occupy million-dollar houses.

By afternoon, the mercury had hit 96 degrees, and the air parched the tongue. I checked out a squat with Mike

Sellinger, another code-enforcement officer, who had already roused the couple living there five times from different properties (the woman, a former nurse, was living off Social Security). Now he was working to board up their current dwelling, inside which we found a blue plastic tub full of canned goods, a stool, and a thin gray kitten. Afterward, I asked Sellinger if he could hold down all the empty houses. He didn't think so.

"Once they get out of there," he said, "they'll go find the next best place." ■

Matthew Quirk is an Atlantic staff editor.

LIVES

Musical Chairs

MICHAEL PETTIS IS A
FINANCE PUNDIT BY DAY,
A BEIJING ROCK IMPRESARIO
BY (VERY LATE) NIGHT.

By James Fallows

THE WORSE THINGS have looked for the world financial system, the more the world has heard from a Beijing-based financial expert named Michael Pettis, whose blog, China Financial Markets (mpettis.com), is one of a handful I check for clues about what is happening in the Chinese economy. On the substance of Pettis's views and why they are attracting attention—he writes op-eds for leading newspapers, and is quoted frequently—I will have more to say. But having sought him out to ask about finance, I became fascinated by what the other aspects of his life say about this moment in China.

Pettis is 50 years old but could be taken for a hard-living version of a man 10 years younger (think Sam Shepard, with thick, tousled black hair). He stays up late and sleeps late. He consumes a lot of coffee and a few cigarettes. His father was Greek American and his mother is French; because of his father's work as a geologist, Pettis grew up around the world and became comfortable in French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Urdu. "Unfortunately, not Chinese!" he told me with a laugh in a Beijing Starbucks.

Though not a musician himself, Pettis has always had an intense interest



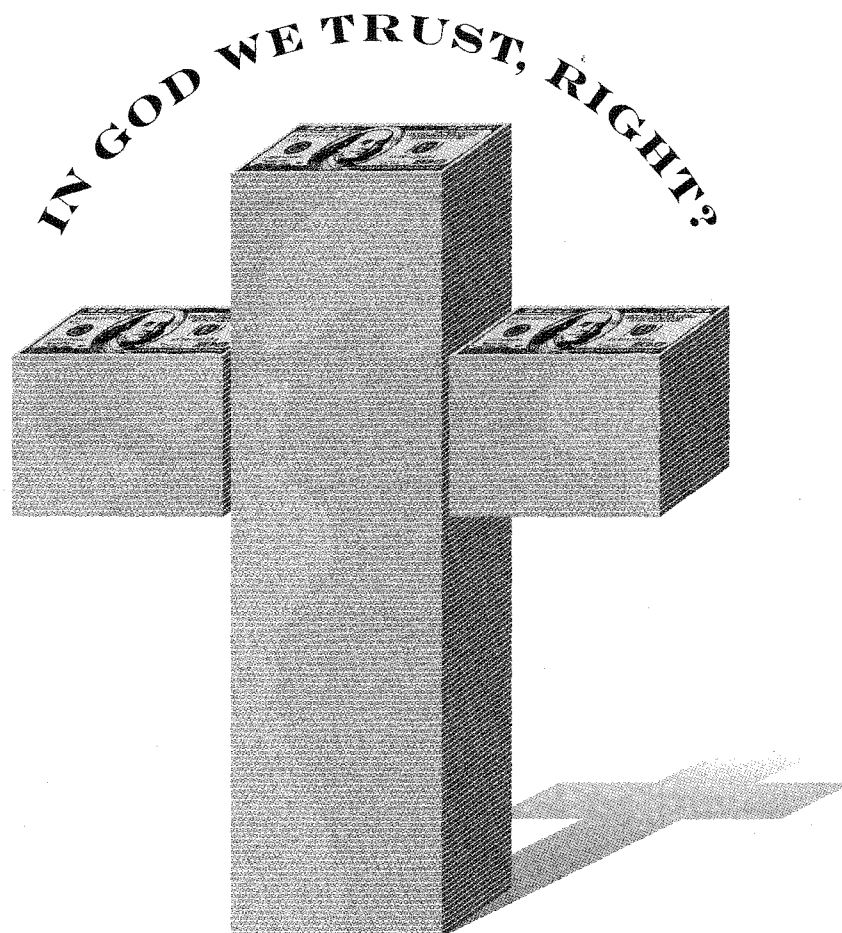
in music. In his 20s, while getting a master's degree in development economics and an M.B.A. from Columbia, he started a record label and opened a club called Safety in Numbers, or SIN, in the East Village. "New York is a very snobby place, where artists are the top of the snob pyramid," he told me. "Basically I started a club because I wanted to meet my heroes"—bands like Sonic Youth and Swans, which appeared at SIN.

By 1987, in his late 20s, Pettis had finished graduate school and begun work as a trader on Wall Street. Later he began teaching at Columbia's Business School and School of International and Public Affairs. In 2001, on a whim, he came for a week's vacation to China, a country that had never much interested him, and decided to change his life plans.

"I was so excited by what I'd seen that on the flight home I decided to see if I could get a teaching gig in China for a couple of years," he told me. "My trading work was becoming cookie-cutter, so I thought I'd take a break and then come back to New York." Within a few months, thanks to the intervention of a Chinese student who had taken his courses at Columbia, he had an appointment as a professor of finance at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China's counterpart to MIT. After a few years, he switched to the Guanghua School of Management at Peking University, the next-door liberal-arts rival, to see how it compared. Seven years later, he has no foreseeable plans to go home.

Pettis said that from the time he arrived, he'd been looking for a way into Beijing's nascent music scene. He went to clubs, heard bands that sounded like U.S. or European wannabes, and eventually decided to start a club and record label to give new, original Chinese talent and visiting foreign bands a showcase. The club, D-22 ("I wanted to call it 'Detroit'—urban, industrial—but that's hard to say in Chinese"), opened in 2006 in Beijing's student-ghetto area, Wudaokou, right between Tsinghua and Peking U, and has been a huge success, attracting young Chinese and international crowds. One of its hottest acts is the 23-year-old Chinese guitar virtuoso Shouwang, plus his band, the Carsick Cars. Recently the *New Yorker*

GALLERY CHURCH & STATE by Nigel Holmes



critic Alex Ross named a solo performance by Shouwang at D-22 as one of the top 10 classical-music events of the past year. In January a Beijing music magazine named Pettis the godfather of the city's new-music boom.

Pettis still has his day job teaching finance courses—where, as with music, he's part of an on-the-fly invention of new Chinese styles.

Anyone who has heard a standard Chinese university lecture knows how dull it can be. The professor drones, the students transcribe, and "education" means parroting the answers the professor originally served up. In his classes, Pettis has instead applied a Western model of engaged liberal education. He tells students not to take notes in his lectures (!) and not to worry about memorizing what he says for

exams. Instead he asks them questions and tells them to challenge each other—and him. "I tell them it's up to them to figure out what's 'right,'" he told me. "I say it a lot, because they're not used to hearing it." He has a standing offer of an automatic A in his courses, no exam required, to any student who will argue with him in class, and win. "Of course I could always 'win,' since I know more about the topic," he told me. Plus, all discussion is in English. "Really all I'm looking for is an intelligent disagreement, catching me out on a point, which I consider a win."

Seeing people, Chinese and foreign, work out new styles and lives each day: that is the part of China I will miss when I finally have to go home. ■

James Fallows is an Atlantic national correspondent.



Is it a cupcake or is it a muffin? Only the icing gives it away.

FOOD

Not So Guilty Pleasure

IF ONLY SOMEBODY COULD GET THE CUPCAKE RIGHT

By Corby Kummer

C LOYINGLY CUTE CUPCAKE shops may seem passé in New York, but they continue to thrive there, and new ones seem to open across the land by the month. Silly and disappointing as most of these shops are, the craze is worth keeping—if only, like the audiences at La Scala, to keep applauding till the performers do better.

A good cupcake has all the frosting you really want at a birthday party but can't ask for. It's celebratory but restrained, a suitably small indulgence for tough times. And, surprisingly, a cupcake can be a smaller indulgence than a wholesome-seeming muffin: under the icing, as any baker knows, there's practically no difference.

Far be it from me to advocate eating Hostess cupcakes: they symbolize the industrial depredation of anything homemade, the triumph of Big Baking Brother (perhaps in his death throes: Interstate Bakeries, the company that makes them, Twinkies, and Wonder Bread, has been in bankruptcy since 2004). And yet a Hostess cupcake has 180 calories. A blueberry muffin at a typical Starbucks has 360—the same amount

as a lavishly iced Starbucks chocolate cupcake. The un-iced chocolate cream-cheese muffin has 440. Might as well have a breakfast you'll enjoy!

Cupcakes may be largely icing-delivery vehicles, but the cake shouldn't be cardboard and the icing shouldn't be grease—twin concepts few artisan bakers (*artisan* being the new word for *homemade*) seem to get. Cooked French buttercream, which many of them choose (it shows off Technique), is not a suitable cupcake icing. It's oily. It smears. A simple glaze—think Hostess, but with good chocolate—is. And best is the simple icing that for many people evokes childhood: butter beaten with confectioner's sugar and milk and vanilla, light-textured and creamy but with a satisfying snap when you bite into it. Because this icing, when made with shortening, says “cheap supermarket cake” to artisan bakers, they shun it.

New York's Magnolia Bakery, which used this icing to launch the craze, gets it right—but its cake has almost no flavor, as a blindfolded tasting with my 14-year-old niece proved. Neither of us could tell the difference between vanilla, chocolate, and red-velvet cake, which

to be fair never tastes like anything—it has a bit of cocoa and a lot of food coloring, and seems to be popular for its usual cream-cheese icing. And all the samples, though fresh, were dry. (When people say that homemade cupcakes are always better, they generally mean fresher. Most homemade cupcakes start with a mix.) Buttercup, started by a disaffected Magnolia founder, had much better cake but less-interesting icing, and better than both was another Magnolia offshoot in the city, Sugar Sweet Sunshine.

You have to get over the names. Then you have to get over the novelties, like the rum-soaked Mojito with lime icing and the corn-dog-style mock Twinkie at Kickass Cupcakes, a typically whimsical and cheery shop in Somerville, near Boston. The only just-right cupcake I've found so far was at Baked and Wired, a hip Georgetown café. The plain white icing on its “birthday” cupcake (pictured here) had exactly the right crackle when I bit into it, and the chocolate cake was moist, airy, and not too rich.

The main difference between a cupcake and a muffin is a light, open crumb, Flo Braker, expert baker and author of the new and long-awaited *Baking for All Occasions*, told me. She has reformulated a recipe in her book for *Atlantic* readers, for maximal lightness; you can find it at www.theatlantic.com/cupcakes.

The real culprit keeping cupcakes from fitting my definition of “health food” is less the icing than the plague of plenty that has invaded the entire food industry: portion size. Joanne Chang, a Boston pastry chef and restaurateur, told me that when she opened her Flour Bakery she used home-sized, two-ounce muffin tins for her muffins and cupcakes. Customers balked at paying premium prices for what they regarded as miniatures. Chang bought the four-ounce tins that virtually every bakery uses, and customers “stopped complaining”—but she didn't stop feeling guilty that she was giving customers “enough to feed a family of four.” “We're competing against what people see on TV,” she said with a sigh. People should look at their own muffin tins to remember what a single serving looks like. **A**

Corby Kummer is an Atlantic senior editor.

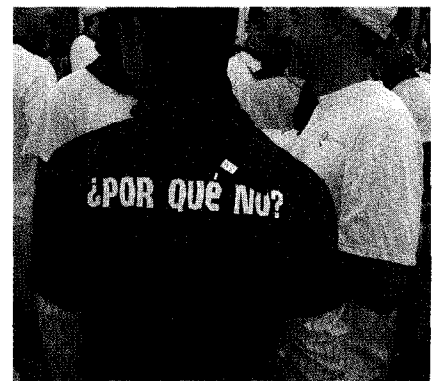
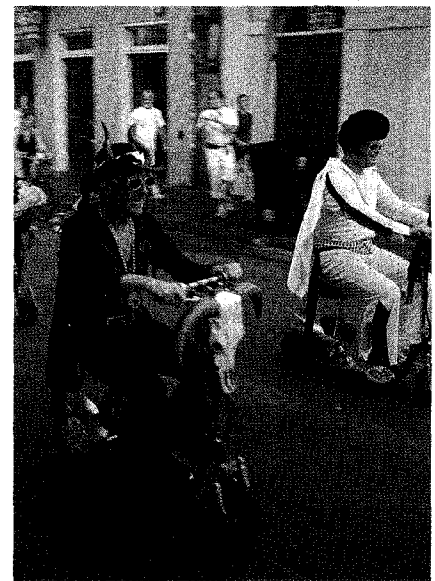
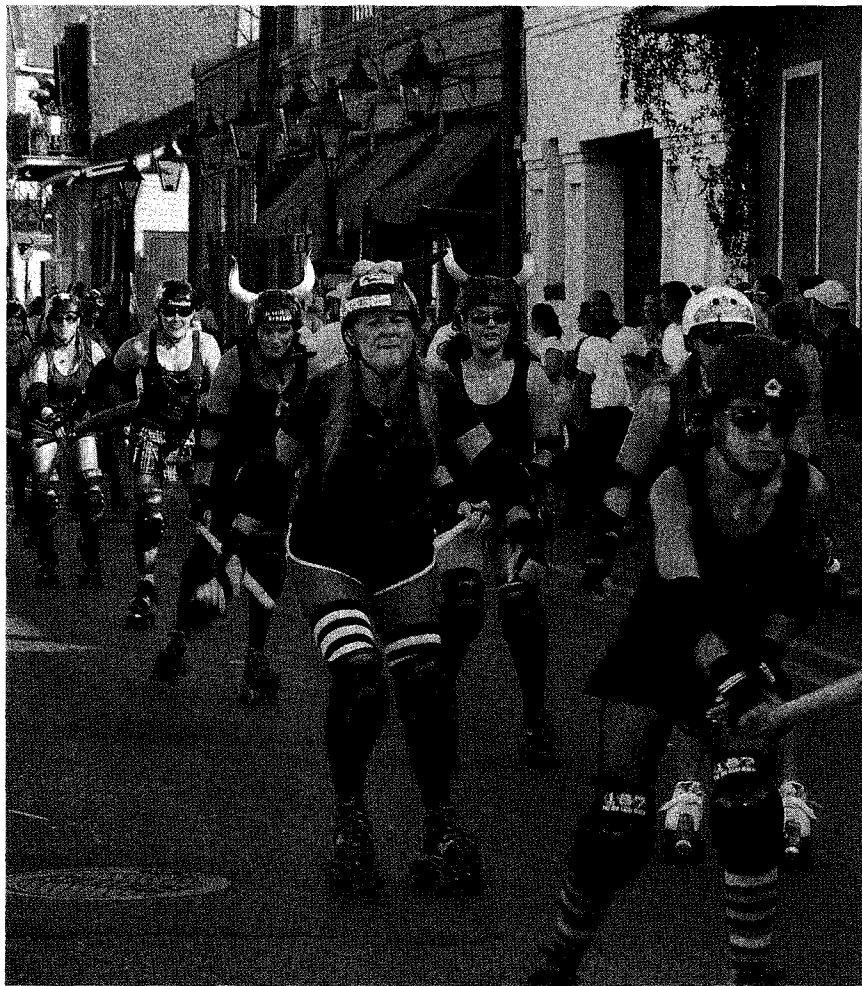
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Street theater NOLA-style: the Big Easy Rollergirls—aka PETA-acceptable “bulls”—and scooter-riding Elvises. And why not?

TRAVEL

All the Street's a Stage

NEW ORLEANS STILL HAS A WAY OF MAKING YOU FEEL AS IF YOU'VE BEEN TIPLING, EVEN WHEN YOU'RE STONE SOBER.

By Wayne Curtis

IT WAS EARLY morning in July and the sunlight in the French Quarter was silvery and sharp as scissors. The street was filled with hundreds of people dressed in white wearing red waistbands or red neckerchiefs or both. They looked like chrysanthemums, but chrysanthemums drinking beer. Everyone knelt. A man with a bullhorn shouted a prayer and people said “Amen” and stood up. Then a horn sounded—a loud and piercing horn, more keenly heard by those who had been drinking long through the night—and the crowd began to run toward the river. They ran through the narrow streets, past people standing

on balconies holding their coffee. The bulls were coming.

I'll say this: New Orleans knows how to do street theater like no other American city. In fact, it's often unclear where the theater ends and the street begins: the jazz funerals, the second lines, the sidewalk barbecues during Jazzfest, the weeks-long celebration leading up to Mardi Gras. Despite Katrina and the slow rebuilding and the appalling crime rate, New Orleans remains a place where the street can surprise and often startle, and do this in a good way. Pageants large and small unfold against a backdrop of colorful Creole and Caribbean architecture,

amid sounds and smells not found elsewhere in the United States.

San Fermin in Nueva Orleans is among the newer additions to the street here, having begun in 2007 when a wine salesman named Mickey Hanning, who goes by “El Padrino,” got the notion that a running of the bulls through the French Quarter would be a good thing to do. Hanning had attended the *encierro* in Pamplona, Spain, in 2002, and it made a large impression on him. So two years ago, Hanning and some friends, who called themselves Los Pastores, organized a run mostly by enlisting one bar to serve as the starting line, and another the finish line.

The actual bulls presented some logistical challenges, what with liability laws and PETA and such. So someone threw out the idea of inviting the local rollergirl team to don horned helmets, like those worn by Vikings, and menace the runners with plastic Wiffle bats.

LEFT: SCOTT STUNTZ; RIGHT: WAYNE CURTIS

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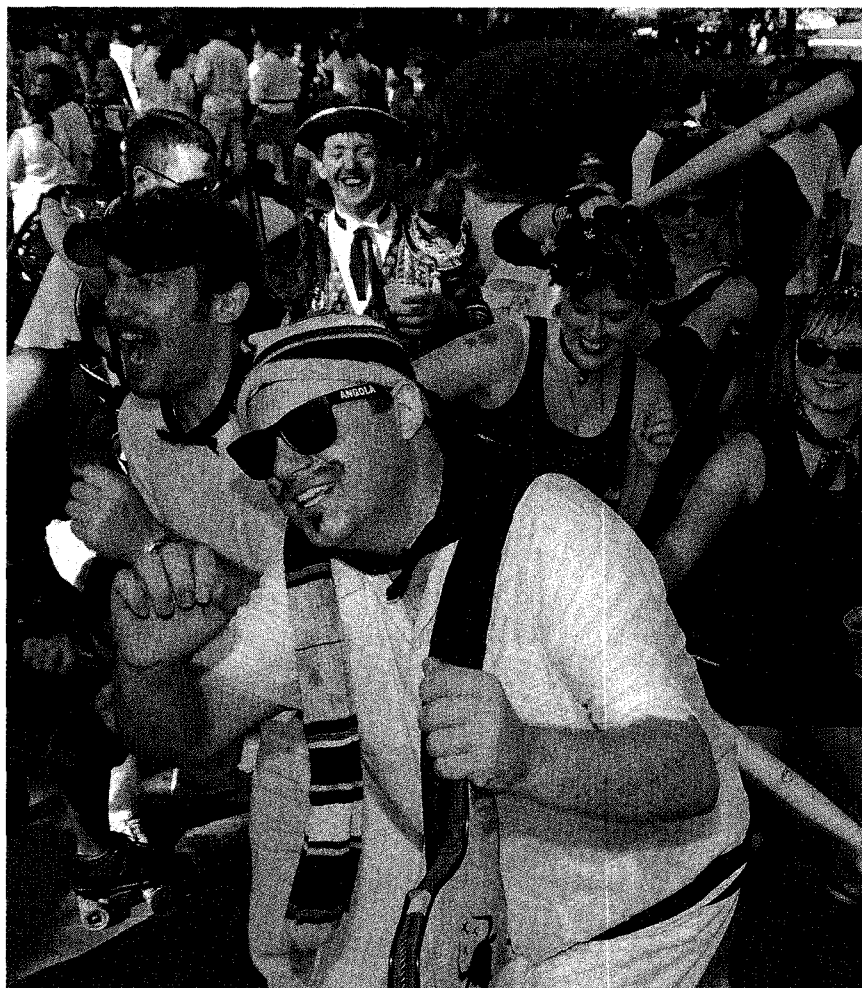
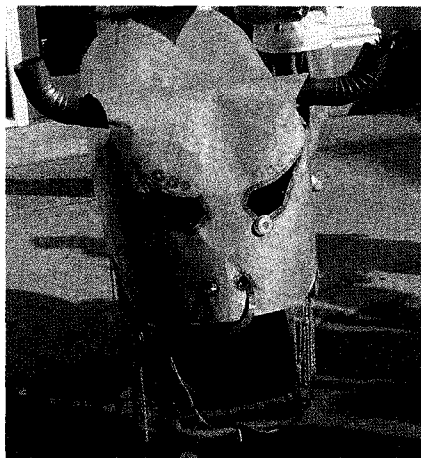


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San Fermin in Nueva Orleans is one of a growing number of street shows that welcome visitor participation, and lunacy.

Some discussion ensued, but the idea was so patently excellent that it quickly prevailed. And on a steamy July morning in 2007, a dozen roller girls and 200 runners showed up—mostly gathered through word of mouth and a MySpace page. The next year Los Pastores, sensing they were onto something, created a Web site (nolabulls.com), got actual permits from the police, and handed out flyers around town. Nearly three dozen roller girls and some 600 runners showed up at eight o'clock on a Saturday morning, my wife and I among them.

We wore white outfits with red sashes, we knelt, we prayed, we ran when the air horn sounded and the crowd moved as one. The French Quarter, with its picturesquely spalling walls and tendrilly weeds spilling from cornices, often feels like a movie set, especially in the light of summer. Running with hundreds of excitable, shouting people

dressed alike did little to lessen the cinematic flavor.

We rounded a slick corner onto Bourbon Street, past confused tourists and then past Larry Flynt's Barely Legal club and the All-Male Review. We involuntarily sped up when a great roar behind us suggested the bulls were gaining. We veered toward the curb. The bulls skated by; neither of us was grievously Wiffled. I retreated to a banquette to watch the last of the bulls, and they were followed by about 10 Elvis impersonators on motorized scooters—some of whom wore capes—whose purpose was uncertain. At the finish, a line of runners stood bent over, awaiting their turn to be smacked by the happy-to-cooperate bulls.

The whole *encierro* was over in less than 10 minutes. We then went off with the crowd, to find a drink at the bar near the French Market—it was, after all, nearly 9 a.m., the humidity was nearing

poaching levels, and we had run several entire blocks. By the time we got our Bloody Marys, the drinks seemed slightly redundant. New Orleans has a way of making you feel as if you've been tipling, even when you're stone sober: colors are brighter, sounds clearer, images indelible.

The next *encierro* in New Orleans is slated for the morning of July 11. Hanning is hoping to expand it into a three-day event this year, and he envisions a time when the entire city might be dressed in red and white, at least for a day. Meanwhile, he's organizing his second Andrzejki, a celebration of Saint Andrew's Day, which last year brought out about 200 people to compete in eating kielbasas the size of Wiffle bats, and to parade through an empty city in a cold rain behind bagpipers and a small squadron of scooter-riding Elvses. ▀

Wayne Curtis is an Atlantic correspondent.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MARK GSTOHL; SCOTT STUNTZ; MATT MCINTOSH



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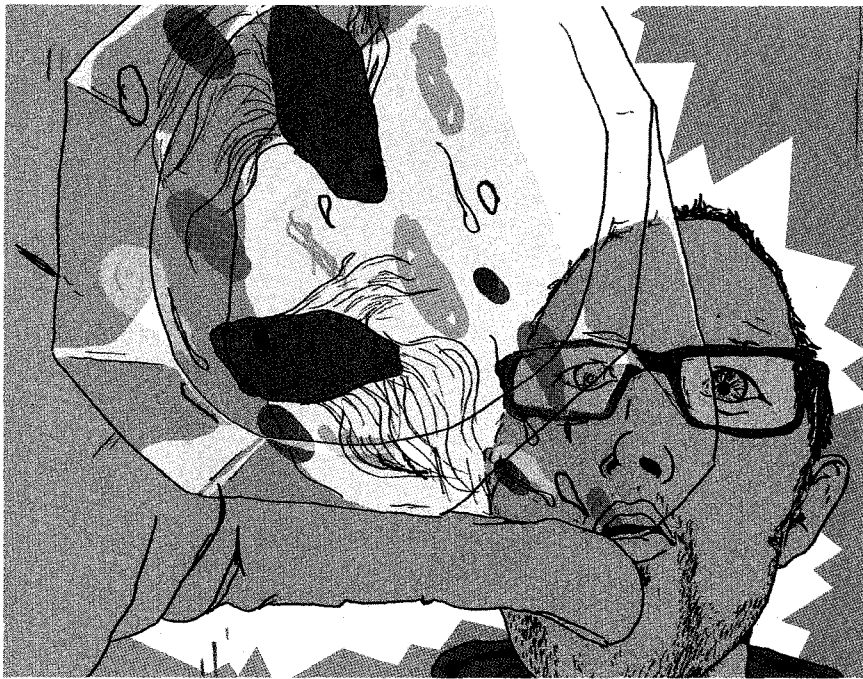
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TECHNOLOGY

Pipe Dreams

THE QUEST FOR PURE DRINKING WATER IN AN IMPERFECT WORLD

By Luke O'Brien

THE ALCOHOLIC COMEDIAN W. C. Fields offered this rationale for not drinking water (absent whiskey): "Fish fuck in it." Clearly, Fields preceded Brita. But there are reasons less bawdy to worry about the stuff flowing from our faucets these days: cryptosporidium cysts, lead from corroding pipes, a stew of sex hormones and other drugs that people excrete down toilets and into our water supply. An Associated Press investigation last year revealed that trace amounts of pharmaceuticals make their way into the drinking water of at least 41 million Americans. These chemicals (for example, meds for angina, cholesterol, epilepsy) can accumulate in the body, in a process that scientists don't fully understand. Fish may fornicate in our water sources, but thanks to estrogen-like endocrine disrupters that have built up in watersheds such as Washington, D.C.'s Potomac River, some male fish have been found with immature eggs in their testes. Fish in Texas have been found with the active ingredient of Prozac in their brains. Only an alcoholic comedian would think this funny.

Much bottled water is no safer than tap water. (Actually, much of it *is* tap water treated with ozone.) So what's to be done? The answer may lie in those gadgets found in so many yuppie kitchens: water purifiers. These range from Atlantic Ultraviolet's MightyPure, which zaps water with radiation, to Katadyn's Ultralight Series of portable systems that use iodine, among other things, and look like sports bottles. Most filters, however, take the form of a dense carbon slug inserted into a pitcher or attached to a water line. Water flows through the slug, leaving organic material and heavy metals behind, along with that briny chlorine taste. These devices—Brita (a subsidiary, interestingly, of Clorox) and PUR being the best-known—are inexpensive and perform well. But carbon filters can miss drugs in the water. If the filters overload, they can dump excess contaminants, making your water less clean, not more.

Discerning drinkers may care to investigate more sophisticated methods. Like reverse osmosis. This technology is used to desalinate seawater. It works the same with your tap water, forcing liquid through a semipermeable membrane

that strips out a broader range of contaminants than a carbon filter alone. But reverse-osmosis contraptions can be slow and cost hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars. Most also come with pumpkin-sized storage tanks. One exception is General Electric's Merlin system, an elegant tankless device that can process more than 700 gallons of water a day.

Reverse osmosis purges many pharmaceuticals from water, but not all.

As a D.C. resident, I prefer that most ancient and effective technology—the still. Rudimentary forms of distillation emerged thousands of years ago, but it was Islamic scientists working between the eighth and 12th centuries who perfected the precursors to what sits on my countertop today: a Waterwise Model 4000, similar to several other devices on the market. High-end consumers might prefer something like Rainpure's Cirrus 20, which uses a vacuum chamber and looks like an iMac crossed with a Bang & Olufsen stereo. But my machine, which cost \$379, gets the job done. It boils water and vents the first vapor, which can contain volatile organic compounds. (A good distiller must do this, lest contaminants carry over.) The rest of the steam travels into condenser fins, cools back into water, then drips through a carbon filter. When I wake up (it takes about four hours to make a gallon), there's a jug of about 99.5 percent pure water waiting for me.

Distillation also leaves ample evidence of its effectiveness. Inside my still's boiling chamber each morning sits a brown sludge that hardens into a crust. In a cleaner world, the sludge would consist only of calcium carbonate (limestone), a white and odorless substance. But my sludge is brown and noisome. It smells like a log of cookie dough left out in the sun and then rolled in cobwebs, the bouquet of the nearby aquatic bestiary. And when I wash it off, that's where it returns. To exist in a modern world, we must often ignore its indecorous parts: the rivers of waste we produce, the intersexual fish we create. We can allow such horrors to ebb into our subconscious, a tidal flat of deferred disquietude. Or we can hope to filter them out. ■

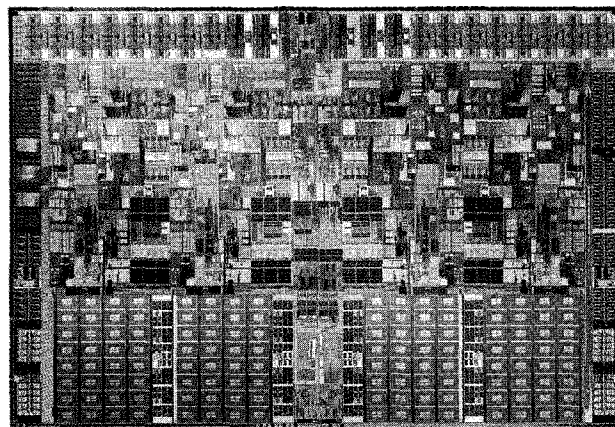
Luke O'Brien is a writer in Washington, D.C.

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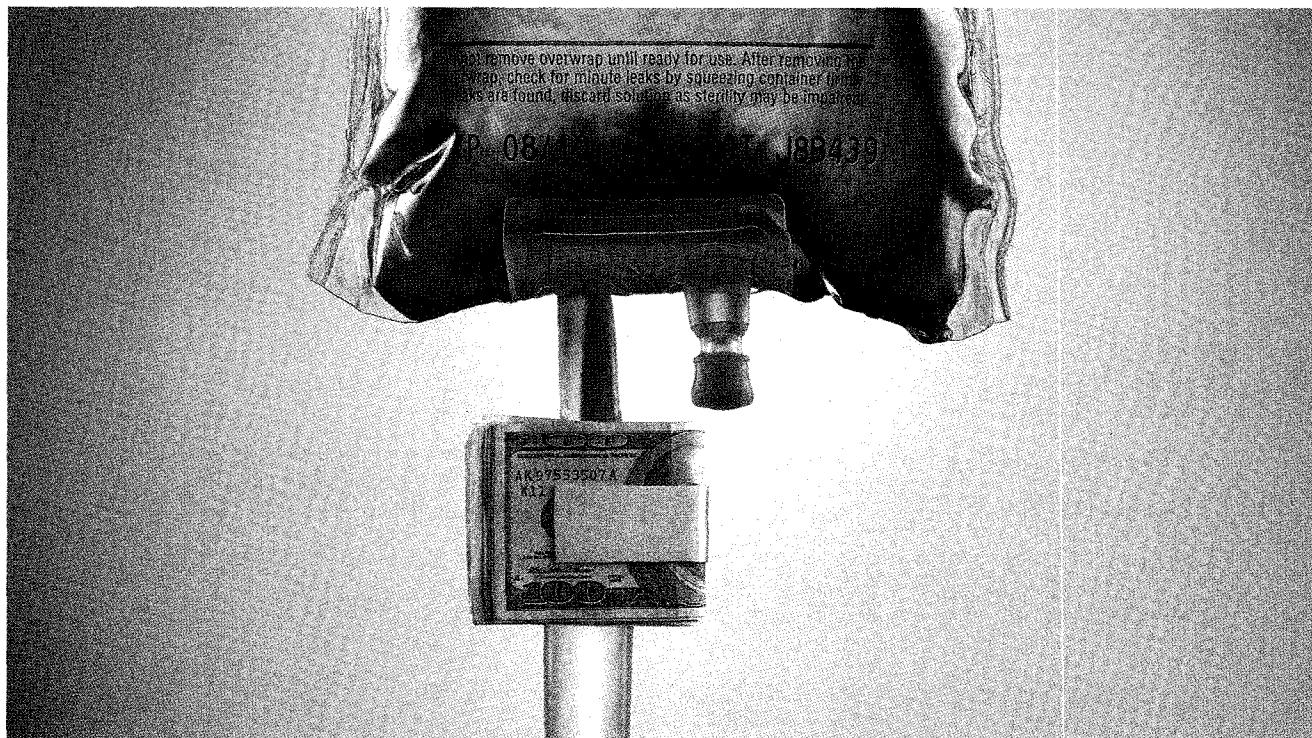
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My Drug Problem

The cancer drug Herceptin saved the author's life. It also cost \$60,000. Would health-care reform put it, and other expensive new drugs, out of reach?

By Virginia Postrel

IF I LIVED in New Zealand, I'd be dead.

That's the lead my editor wanted me to write, and I have to admit it's great. Alas (for this column, at least), it's not exactly true. But neither is it false. And the ways in which it's partly true matter greatly, not just to me or to New Zealanders but to anyone who might get cancer or care about someone who does.

The American health-care system may be a crazy mess, but it is the prime mover in the global ecology of medical treatment, creating the world's biggest market for new drugs and devices. Even as we argue about whether or how our health-care system should change, most Americans take for granted our

access to the best available cancer treatments—including the one that arguably saved my life.

In mid-July 2007, after a routine mammogram, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. As cancer diagnoses go, mine wasn't particularly scary. The affected area was small, and the surgeon seemed to think that a lumpectomy followed by radiation would eradicate the cancerous tissue. Surgery was scheduled for late August, allowing me to complete a planned move from Dallas to Los Angeles.

Two days before the surgery, I went in for magnetic resonance imaging; the MRI would be used to place wires marking the cancer hot spot. On the day of my surgery, I showed up at the UCLA radiology department expecting

a routine procedure to insert the wires. Instead, I got news that turned me cold and shaky. The scan had detected a large, completely distinct hot spot in another area of the breast. My prognosis had suddenly become less cheery.

The post-surgery pathology report wasn't reassuring. Although the tumor was indeed tiny—just seven millimeters across—cancer cells were all over the place; they had invaded my lympho-vascular system and extended beyond the margins of both areas of surgically removed tissue. All six of the excised lymph nodes were malignant, a bad sign. The cancer also tested positive for a genetic trait called HER2, found in 20 to 25 percent of breast-cancer patients, which marked the cancer as particularly aggressive. Given the details of

MARK HOOPER

my case, with more surgery, traditional chemotherapy, and radiation, I had only a 50 percent chance of surviving.

I was lucky, however. Those were no longer the only treatment options. Adding the biological drug Herceptin, approved by the FDA in 2006 for use in early-stage cancers like mine, could increase my survival odds from a coin flip to 95 percent.

Starting in the late 1990s, oncologists had used Herceptin to extend the lives of patients whose HER2-positive cancers were advanced and metastatic, buying them months, and in some cases years, of life. Then, in May 2005, reports of clinical trials on patients with early-stage HER2-positive breast cancer electrified the American Society of Clinical Oncology's annual meeting. Herceptin halved the chances of cancer recurrence: from one in six to one in 12 after two years. No one knew what would happen after five or 10 years, but the preliminary results were, to quote a *New England Journal of Medicine* editorial, "stunning."

For breast cancer that hasn't spread elsewhere in the body, Herceptin offers the possibility of a cure. It enhances chemotherapy, encourages the immune system to attack cancer cells, and hinders those cells from reproducing. A year of the drug, with one dose every three weeks (or, for some patients, along with weekly chemotherapy), is now the international standard of care for patients with cancers like mine. So, along with chemotherapy, another round of surgery, and seven and a half weeks of daily radiation, that's what I got. The Herceptin treatments cost my insurer about \$60,000. A year later, I have no evidence of disease and, though it's still early, I have hope of staying that way indefinitely.

Not everyone in similarly rich countries is so lucky—something to remember the next time you hear a call to "tame runaway medical spending." Consider New Zealand. There, a government agency called Pharmac evaluates the efficacy of new drugs, decides which drugs are cost-effective, and negotiates the prices to be paid by the national health-care system. These functions are separate in most countries, but thanks to this integrated approach, Pharmac has indeed tamed the national drug

budget. New Zealand spent \$303 per capita on drugs in 2006, compared with \$843 in the United States. Unfortunately for patients, Pharmac gets those impressive results by saying no to new treatments. New Zealand "is a good tourist destination, but options for cancer treatment are not so attractive there right now," Richard Isaacs, an oncologist in Palmerston North, on New Zealand's North Island, told me in October.

A more centralized U.S. health-care system might reap some one-time administrative savings, but over the long term, cutting costs requires the kinds of controls that make Americans hate managed care. You have to deny patients some of the things they want, including cancer drugs that are promising but expensive. Policy wonks dream of objective technocrats (perhaps at the "independent institute to guide reviews and research on comparative effectiveness" proposed by Barack Obama) who will rationally "scrutinize new treatments for effectiveness," as *The New Republic's* Jonathan Cohn puts it. But neither science nor liberal democracy works quite so neatly.

In New Zealand, for example, Herceptin is a high-profile public issue. Until July 2007, Pharmac wouldn't fund the drug for early-stage breast cancer. (It has covered the drug for the advanced disease since 2002.) In protest, activists filed lawsuits and sent petitions to Parliament. Pink-clad motorcycle riders circled the North Island in a "Bikers for Boobs" publicity stunt that got widespread attention. To pay for treatments, women who could do so have mortgaged their homes, dipped into their retirement savings, and held fund-raisers among their neighbors. Many have cut their treatments short to save money. "It's not easy to sit down every three weeks and write a check out for four and a half thousand dollars," says Chris Walsh, a breast-cancer activist who mortgaged her house to buy the drug, stopping after 15 doses rather than the usual 17.

Eventually, Pharmac decided that Herceptin was worth paying for—but

only for nine weeks, or three treatments. Rather than citing costs, the agency claimed to be following the science. It pointed to a small Finnish trial that showed positive results from a nine-week regimen. The government's public statements also emphasized potential cardiac complications from Herceptin. In our October interview, Dr. Isaacs, the oncologist, complained that government spokesmen have been "really skewing the way that people perceive the information. If I had not known what I know and had only listened to the media releases of Pharmac after their last decision, I would have thought, 'Thank goodness we're only giving them nine weeks of this terrible drug.'"

If a shorter treatment can achieve the same results, it makes sense to save money. Did the government have a reasonable case? Passions run high in New Zealand, so I asked a more distant source: John Glaspy, the director of the Women's Cancers Program Area at UCLA's Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center and my own oncologist.

"The government of New Zealand is being accurate when they say that there is no convincing evidence that a year is better than nine weeks," he said. But the Finnish study involved only a couple hundred patients, while the 12-month treatment trials included more than 13,000. The Finnish

results thus are far less statistically certain. We know that a year works. With nine weeks, we're guessing. "The scientific evidence supporting that it is *equally good* to do nine weeks compared to a year isn't there," says Glaspy.

You can err on the side of patient safety or on the side of cost. New Zealand chose the latter. It just didn't want to admit its priorities, preferring to conflate economic and medical questions. No public figure wants to seem heartless, after all.

That surely accounts for the most damning inconsistency in New Zealand's policy. When Pharmac was denying Herceptin to early-stage patients, it was fully funding the drug, without limitations, for women with advanced

Breast-cancer patients are numerous, organized, and highly visible. They usually get what they want.

metastatic cancer, who are just buying time. A purely rational calculation would suggest the opposite course: letting patients with advanced cancer die while shifting the money to early-stage patients who, if treated, might survive for decades. But once a treatment has become standard practice, taking it away is hard.

Contrary to the dreams of technocrats, in the real world, politics and emotion matter. In that sense, New Zealand's resistance on Herceptin is unusual. Breast-cancer patients are numerous, organized, and highly visible. They usually get what they want. Four days after the U.S. election, New Zealand also held national elections that marked a political change. The Labour Party is out. The National Party is in—and it promised to fully fund Herceptin, bypassing the Pharmac process altogether. "Herceptin funding was a significant election issue," wrote Libby Burgess, the chair of the Breast Cancer Aotearoa Coalition, in a post-election e-mail. (*Aotearoa* is the Maori word for New Zealand.) "We feel we have emerged into the light after three years of struggle."

New Zealand was a rare holdout. Most of Canada's provinces approved Herceptin for early-stage patients within a few months of the May 2005 reports, much faster than the usual pattern. The same thing happened in the United Kingdom, where the health minister ordered the notoriously cheapskate National Health Service to cover Herceptin before the country's cost-effectiveness bureaucrats had even issued a report. By contrast, kidney-cancer patients, who are less numerous and harder to treat, weren't so fortunate. In August, those same bureaucrats, at the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, better known as NICE, turned down four new therapies for that disease, arguing that they cost too much.

"They clearly got panic-stricken because there were four of them," charges Gordon McVie, the former chief executive of Cancer Research UK

and a senior consultant at the European Institute of Oncology in Milan. If all four drugs were available, a single kidney-cancer patient might run through the entire list, spending tens of thousands of pounds for each treatment. McVie, a prominent critic of the National Health Service's approach to cancer care, still practices oncology one day a week in Bristol. When his English kidney-cancer patients need Sutent, one of the new drugs, he advises them to come to Milan for treatment. Patients have to cover their own drug bills, but they can buy Sutent more cheaply in Italy and don't risk losing NHS coverage of the rest of their care.

That sort of private payment, and the two-tiered medicine it implies, is becoming common in supposedly universal systems. Private infusion clinics have been springing up all over Canada,

offering cancer drugs to patients who either can pay themselves or have private health insurance, usually through an employer, that will cover the cost. While several Canadian provinces have allowed such private payment, this "topping up" has been controversial in the U.K. Some regional authorities threatened to exclude patients from all NHS coverage if they pay private providers for pricey cancer drugs. (Despite its name, the NHS works through local authorities that don't necessarily provide uniform coverage, creating what critics call a "postcode lottery.")

Going outside the system means two sets of doctors, making it harder to coordinate care. But allowing patients to buy drugs to be administered within the NHS would threaten the system's egalitarian ideology. "Two patients with the same condition could find themselves lying next to each other on the same ward, yet receive very different treatments, not because that is what doctors advise, but because one person can afford to pay extra to top up their care while the other cannot," Karen Jennings, the health chief for Unison, a public-employees union, wrote in a September op-ed. She warned that if

such "co-payments are allowed, they will fast become the norm." But kicking out patients who've paid taxes into the system, just because they spend their own money on cancer drugs, has become untenable.

Sure enough, in early November the health ministry announced a new policy allowing NHS patients to "top up" payments. In a concession to egalitarian treatment, the new policy calls for patients to receive the drugs outside of NHS wards—little comfort to traditional socialists. "The decision to allow a two-tier NHS is undignified and divisive," opined *The Lancet*. But the journal's definition of dignity has proved incompatible with the country's democracy. Citizens expect to be able to buy the drugs they need, and politicians respond to public pressure. As an oncologist writing in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* observes, "Consumerism and social solidarity do not sit comfortably together."

Looking at the crazy-quilt American system, you might imagine that someone somewhere has figured out how to deliver the best possible health care to everyone, at no charge to patients and minimal cost to the insurer or the public treasury. But nobody has. In a public system, trade-offs don't go away; if anything, they get harder.

The good thing about a decentralized, largely private system like ours is that health care constantly gets weighed against everything else in the economy. No single authority has to decide whether 15 percent or 20 percent or 25 percent is the "right" amount of GDP to spend on health care, just as no single authority has to decide how much to spend on food or clothing or entertainment. Different individuals and organizations can make different trade-offs. Centralized systems, by contrast, have one health budget. This treatment gets funded, and that one doesn't.

If I lived in New Zealand, I wouldn't be dead, just a lot poorer. But if every place were like New Zealand, far fewer complex new drugs would get developed in the first place. And my odds of survival would be much, much lower. ■

Virginia Postrel is an Atlantic contributing editor and the editor in chief of deepglamour.net. She is writing a book about glamour.

In a public health-care system, trade-offs don't go away; if anything, they just get harder.

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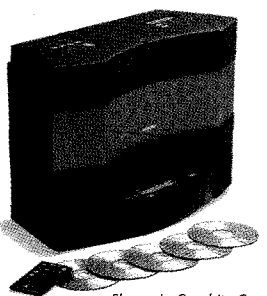
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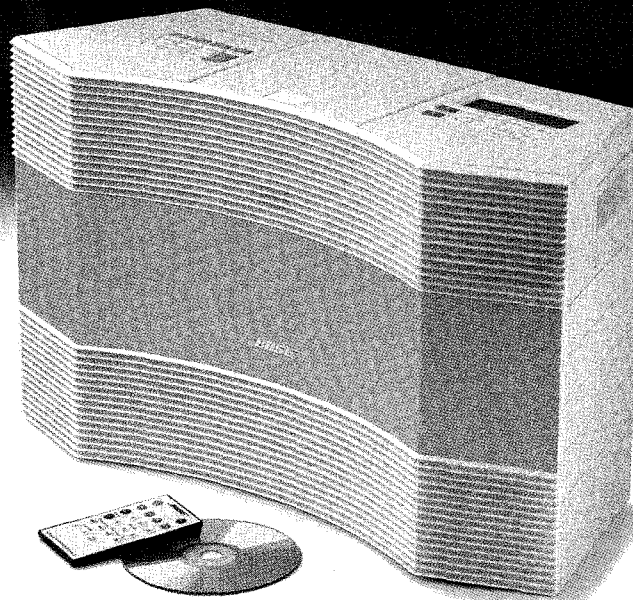
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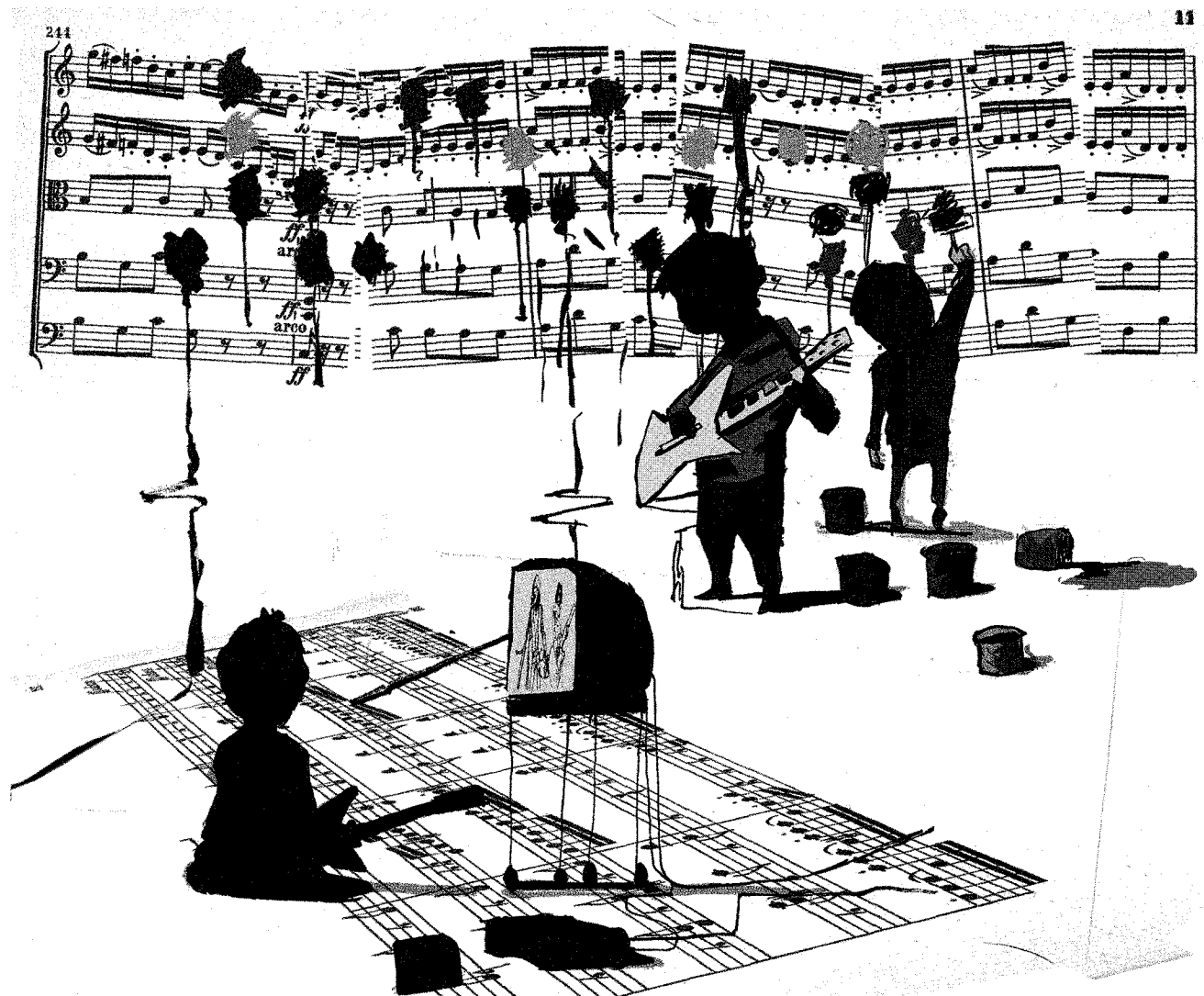
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School of Rock

What does Guitar Hero's popularity mean for the future of rock and roll?

By James Parker

WE'RE JUST easing into "Sweet Emotion"—the highlight of our set, the serotonin payload—when I experience a lapse in creative voltage. Tom Hamilton is moving his fingers through that strange swoon of a bass line; Steven Tyler skims the stage, mouth agape in song, his molars glowing under the black light like a row of tiny moons. Then there's me—Joe Perry, Aerosmith's lead

guitarist, sinews musically taut, bracing myself for the riff as it sails out of the ether toward me in fat notes of red, blue, yellow, and green. I hit it once, I hit it twice, and then ... I miss it. Damn! The notes keep coming, but my '70s super-sound has broken up—what? *how?*—into clucks and clangs of dissonance, ruinous post-punk fragments. The song lurches and dies. Drones of disapproval from the crowd. Tyler contemplates me sourly, hands on hips. I see Hamilton mouth-ing imprecations. Even Joey Kramer is giving me hell, up on his feet behind

his drum kit. Numb with culpability, I stare at my Les Paul. Of the many, many deaths I have endured while playing video games, this may be the worst.

No doubt about it—losing at Guitar Hero: Aerosmith is heavy. And winning is even heavier. If you get it right, if you hit the colored buttons on your little plastic guitar in the correct sequence and find yourself quasi-playing along with the onscreen avatars, you will experience a scalp-tightening surge of hard-rock mastery. The feeling is of a different order from your regular video-game

JEREMY TRAUM

satisfactions: the dark triumph of wiping out a few hundred zombies, or of thumping a pimp in Grand Theft Auto. It's a feeling close to inspiration, and it may help to explain why Guitar Hero and its competitor, Rock Band, are reshaping the video-gaming world, doing funny things to the music industry, and possibly (we shall see) sounding the last trump for rock and roll as we know it.

Some basics first. Guitar Hero and Rock Band, blood rivals in the marketplace, come from the same cradle: Harmonix Music Systems, out of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Guitar Hero was birthed there in 2005, after 10 years of experimentation. The inputs, as they say, were many, but the game couldn't have happened without Konami's Guitar Freaks, a Japanese arcade game in which players diddle hectically with colored buttons on the neck of a guitar-shaped controller to match colored "notes" flashing onscreen.

Guitar Hero's genius was to retain at its core this mimetic act—the buttons, the colors, the high-velocity "beat-matching"—while conjuring around it, via the black arts of the virtual, a floating sensorium of rock-and-roll performance. Now the gamer's guitar-playing libido was bodied forth by an onscreen character, bedight in denim, paisley, or spiked gauntlets, with a band behind him and an audience in front. The music was different, too: instead of lightweight Japanese pop-rock, the Guitar Hero gamer wagged a faux guitar to the austere metallic thrusts of Helmet's "Unsung" or the tripped-out biker boogie "Frankenstein," by the Edgar Winter Group. And the better he played, the more things happened. Lightning writhed across his fretboard; the love of the crowd rose like the wind.

Harmonix, working with the game manufacturer and publisher RedOctane, released Guitar Hero in time for the 2005 holiday season. It sold 1.5 million units. Guitar Hero II, released a year later, sold almost 4 million. Then Harmonix was bought by MTV, while RedOctane, along with the Guitar Hero brand name, was bought by a company called Activision. At this point the "rhythm action games" arms race began. In November 2007 Harmonix released Rock Band, a new game featuring interactive bass, vocals, and drums—Guitar Hero, essentially, but

in four dimensions. Activision countered with Guitar Hero: Aerosmith in June 2008; Harmonix responded with Rock Band 2 in September; and in October Guitar Hero World Tour arrived, clanking with its own interactive bass, vocal, and drum capabilities. The big news of this year's first quarter is Activision's release of Guitar Hero: Metallica. The big, *big* news of the fourth quarter will be the game that Harmonix is developing with Sir Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, Yoko Ono, Olivia Harrison, and other crowned heads of Beatledom.

The philosophical difference between the two franchises, as far as content goes, is that Guitar Hero allows you to inhabit the virtual bodies and personae of your favorite rock stars (Joe Perry, for instance), while Rock Band encourages you to create your own rock star, live your own dream, man. Both franchises, however, rely on pretty much the same business model: after buying the game, its "peripherals" (guitar, drums, etc.), and a bundle of songs, the consumer then purchases *extra* songs at about two bucks a pop in the game's online store.

To a senescent music industry, this "downloadable content" has worked like Ponce de León's Fountain of Youth: a band whose song appears on either Rock Band or Guitar Hero is almost guaranteed an instant and enormous commercial boost. Back catalogs are illuminated, obscurities arbitrarily enthroned. Weezer's "My Name Is Jonas," first released in 1994, reportedly increased its sales tenfold after being featured in Guitar Hero III. Rock Band currently has a library of about 500 songs; since its launch, there have been more than 28 million downloads.

Last December, on a cold and vindictively slushy Massachusetts afternoon, I paid a visit to Harmonix headquarters. I played Rock Band 2 with a group of amiable employees, fat-fingering my way through the Cult's "She Sells Sanctuary," before being shown to the office of Greg LoPiccolo, the company's vice president of product development.

Rock music has entered the age of simulation—of tribute bands, reality TV, and now this virtual experience that replicates the euphoria of rocking out.

Not unexpectedly, he was buzzing. He talked eagerly about the legions of apprentice rockers that the games have summoned into being, and the uptick in business reported by guitar teachers nationwide. The impact of the original Guitar Hero, LoPiccolo told me, took its makers by surprise. "We had this debate internally. Like, does anybody care about rock? And then we did Guitar Hero and discovered to our great relief

that *many* people cared about rock, including a lot of people who didn't apparently know that they cared about it until they got exposed to the material. So did we create that? Or was it already happening?"

Well, *something* was already happening. Games are games, but you don't have to be Jean Baudrillard to detect in all this another coup by the forces of unreality—a

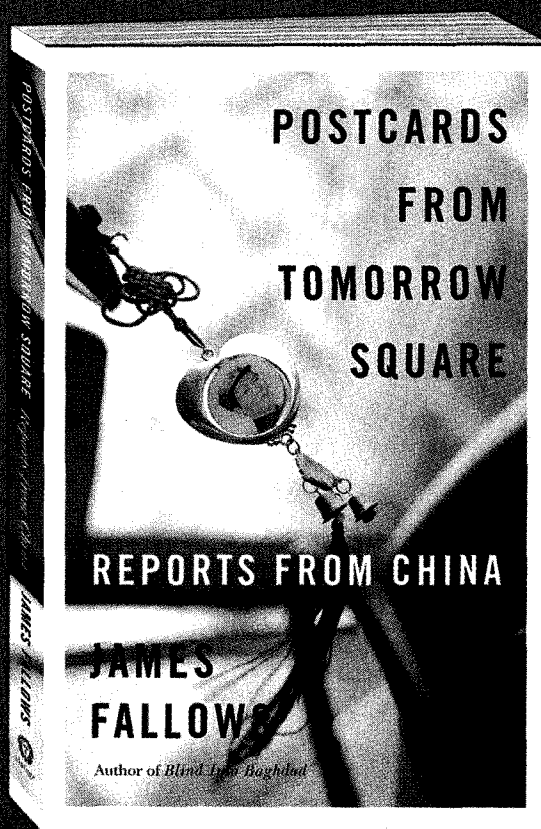
decisive one, perhaps. Rock music, like everything else, has entered the age of simulation—of tribute bands, air-guitar tournaments, reality shows about Gene Simmons, and now this virtual experience that replicates, apparently at a cellular level, the caveman euphoria of rocking out. By such means is Dionysus ironized, and even a god can bear only so much irony.

Also: go down to your local Best Buy on a Saturday and watch the kids demo the latest Rock Band or Guitar Hero. Someone is sitting at the drum pads, tonking along glassy-eyed to Bon Jovi's "Livin' on a Prayer." Someone else is clicking fixedly, his face a mask, through the demented guitar solo from Metallica's "Trapped Under Ice." A screen blossoms with an image from an end-times rock pageant: demonically skinny avatars grimacing over their instruments, a Sly Stone look-alike in Kiss war paint singing a song by Jimmy Eat World. The in-store lighting imposes upon everything a violent sterility, as if we've all just been ejected from some loud and lovely dream. Has rock history ended, its glorious teleology exhausted?

It's possible—but let's not get too worried. For one thing, these games are

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a lot of fun, and fun has its own invincible claim to authenticity. For another, rock depends—has always depended—on simulation: its true tabernacle is the inside of a teenager's head, that palace of delusion, where consciousness climbs like a guitar solo and one is always pretending to be Joe Perry. As long as the adolescent mind dreams and sweats, in other words, there will be rock.

Greg LoPiccolo was at pains, too, to point out the educational component. "The game does set you up, in a way, to be more receptive to learning about how to create music," he said. "You learn about time, you learn about what the parts are ... There's this natural, intuitive knowledge about how songs are composed and arranged that the game totally gives you. My guess is that in five years' time there'll be an explosion of garage bands."

What these bands will sound like is anybody's guess. Some alien new music, draped in weirdness, spooling out of the void and into its devotees' fingertips? Or old tics and gimmicks, and the hoarse exhortations of a vanished rite: "Wooh!" and "C'mon!" and "Bay-beh!" Either way, the end of history can be survived: look at Metallica, star of the new Guitar Hero. Six years ago, it was barely a band at all—more of an un-band or meta-band. Rehab, creative blah, the staleness of fame, a hole where the bassist used to be—Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's 2004 documentary *Some Kind of Monster* records it all. But the ordeal of unreality, once endured, adds spice to everything: the band roared back last year with *Death Magnetic*, its most vividly panicked album yet. "Suicide / I've already died," pronounces James Hetfield in "Cyanide." "You're just the funeral / I've been waiting for!" The syllables are hammered out, blow by blow, on an anvil of guitars. He's outlived himself, damn it.

Can he transmit the wisdom—electrically, as it were—to the kids who'll be aping his moves on Guitar Hero: Metallica, copying his riffs and matching him breath for breath? Burning with solemnity, they'll waggle their toy guitars. The cycle of simulation begins again. It's the very sacrament of rock and roll. **A**

James Parker is an Atlantic correspondent.



You know you're desperate when you're counting on Michael Flatley to goose your network's ratings.

The Future Is Cheese

Why the networks are surrendering prime time to Jay Leno and the Lord of the Dance

By Michael Hirschorn

AROUND THE SAME time NBC announced that Jay Leno, instead of decamping to do late-night comedy for ABC, would remain at NBC and move to a 10 p.m., Monday-through-Friday slot, the creator of the network's fading hit series *Heroes* took a public swan dive into hard concrete.

Speaking at a screenwriter expo in Los Angeles, Tim Kring struggled to

defend his sci-fi-tinged show, which has endured two seasons of faltering ratings. *Heroes* is presented in a serialized format, meaning that stories "arc" over the course of an entire season rather than conclude at the end of each episode, as in a sitcom, or a police procedural such as *CSI* or *Law & Order*. The serialized format is "a very flawed way of telling stories on network television right now," a blogger quoted Kring as saying, "because of the advent of the DVR and online streaming. The engine

that drove [serialized TV] was, you had to be in front of the TV [when it aired]. Now you can watch it when you want, where you want, how you want to watch it, and almost all of those ways are superior to watching it on-air."

Then, in a fit of pique for which he is still apologizing, he said: "So on-air is [relegated] to the saps and the dipshits who can't figure out how to watch it in a superior way."

Kring later claimed that his quote had been "slightly mangled," but the

damage was done. He was blasted by fans and critics ("Try, you know, *not sucking*," *Time's* television blogger, James Poniewozik, bloggishly advised him), and certainly there was something gloriously self-destructive about a 50-something show creator, at the apex of his career after decades of slogging through hack work, publicly attacking the very people who are keeping him in business. But his profane evisceration of his own viewers is of a piece with NBC's decision to sully the sanctum sanctorum of prime time with a talk show: both are signs of an old television order dying and a new one starting to come into focus.

The mere fact that moving a talk-show host from 11:30 to 10 p.m.—a banal decision, on the face of it—has occasioned so much breathless coverage is more a sign of how change-resistant network television has traditionally been. But whether the Leno decision stemmed from desperation (by most gauges, NBC is now the fourth-ranked broadcast network), PR bravado (this is show business, after all), or just an unsentimental recognition of the need to make lemonade out of lemons, it will be only the first of many such moves. Amid an economic downturn that's calling into question most old-school business strategies, the underpinnings of much of the mainstream television business are coming unstuck—and the first casualty may be the profusion of triple-decker, lavishly produced, scripted television that we've all taken for granted.

THE PROBLEM IS a relatively simple one: networks no longer make as much money on television shows as they used to. This makes the economics of scripted television—which is much more expensive to produce than reality or variety shows—far trickier and riskier than ever before. A show like *Heroes* can be an eight- or nine-figure gamble for its backers (usually a combination of a network and a studio), and the return

is far from certain. As the television advertising market—the multibillion-dollar behemoth that makes possible all those excellent explosions and location shoots in Fiji—softens, the makers of TV shows are scrambling to find this money elsewhere. Content owners have traditionally found it in foreign syndication, DVD sales, and merchandising, among other revenue streams. But these markets are either plateauing or softening. This accounts for the rise of "integrated marketing" (all those name-brand products you see showing up in the middle of shows), and the rush to place programming on sites like hulu.com (a partnership between the parent companies of NBC and Fox) or to sell it through, say, iTunes. But neither Hulu nor iTunes offers—yet—a real business model.

This is the "sell side" problem. On the "buy side," the problem is what I'd call cultural attention-deficit disorder,

which afflicts the consumer bombarded with choices: more TV networks (the Emmy Award-winning show *Mad Men* is broadcast on AMC, a channel previously known only for showing movies), more video games, more Web sites, and more ways to consume shows than ever before (VOD, DVD, PPV, etc., etc.). And all of this is compounded by the loss of the social effect: the fewer people

who consume any given piece of media, the fewer people there are to tell you how awesome *The Life & Times of Tim* is and how you simply have to watch it. Amid the chaos, it's difficult for a media consumer to care enough about any one thing to stick with it—and for a network trying to build allegiance to a brand, convincing anyone that what you're showing matters becomes almost impossible. (In the current television season, for example, only one new network show, CBS's *The Mentalist*—a procedural, as it happens—became a bona fide hit, despite the tens of millions all the networks spent on promotion.)

This explains both Leno's prime-time leap and Tim Kring's swan dive.

The only thing network television can *uniquely* offer us non-digitally-optimized saps and dipshits is the promise of immediacy. Leno's content—like that of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, the breakout stars of the past few years—is news-driven, hypertimely, and ultimately disposable, insofar as it loses almost all its value within 24 hours. *American Idol* and *Dancing With the Stars*, consistently the most popular television series over the past two seasons, can capture and hold a brief cultural moment because they're broadcast, judged, and voted on live. *Heroes*, on the other hand, is an inferior experience when consumed in real time, with commercials, Mondays at 9 p.m. In his Howard Beale moment, Kring had things basically correct: his show requires many hours of commitment to understand and fully enjoy, and it's much, much easier to watch the whole thing in a marathon on a rainy Saturday morning—most likely on DVD, via your remarkably cheap Netflix subscription.

Jay Leno's big move is just one obvious response to this reality. NBC got strong ratings, for instance, by running politically themed *Saturday Night Live* prime-time specials on Thursdays during election season, and it's almost inevitable that *SNL*, or a live or topical show that shares its DNA, will appear regularly in prime time in the near future. I also wouldn't be surprised if the *Today* show, or some version thereof, started appearing in the 8 p.m. slot before long. And of course, there's always room for more of my fave, reality TV. One of NBC's ratings successes this winter was the premiere of a live competition show called *Superstars of Dance*, starring the ultimate in cheezy-celebrity: the "Lord of the Dance" himself, Michael Flatley. (Ratings for subsequent installments dropped, perhaps proving that not all cheese ages well.) None of this should be shocking to anyone who has watched TV elsewhere in the world. Italian prime-time TV is filled with rapid variety shows featuring improbably hot chicks cavorting with goatish older men. British prime time is a parade of reality competitions and variety shows of the *Donny & Marie* type, all produced on the cheap and instantly disposable.

The only thing the networks can uniquely offer anymore is the promise of immediacy—which is why there's always room for more reality TV.

As network television takes up a lower-brow position in the cultural pecking order, the higher-quality, more expensive shows will become increasingly independent of the networks that broadcast them. Eventually, networks will stop being brands and start becoming, at least in part, mere “distribution platforms,” a first stop for cultural products on their long journey through other digital media, subscription services, and mobile devices—more like movie-theater chains, in other words, than like movie studios of yore. Just as a premiere in a movie house now largely serves as a way to market the DVD, or sell products, so too is the TV “premiere” just a billboard for the show’s future life.

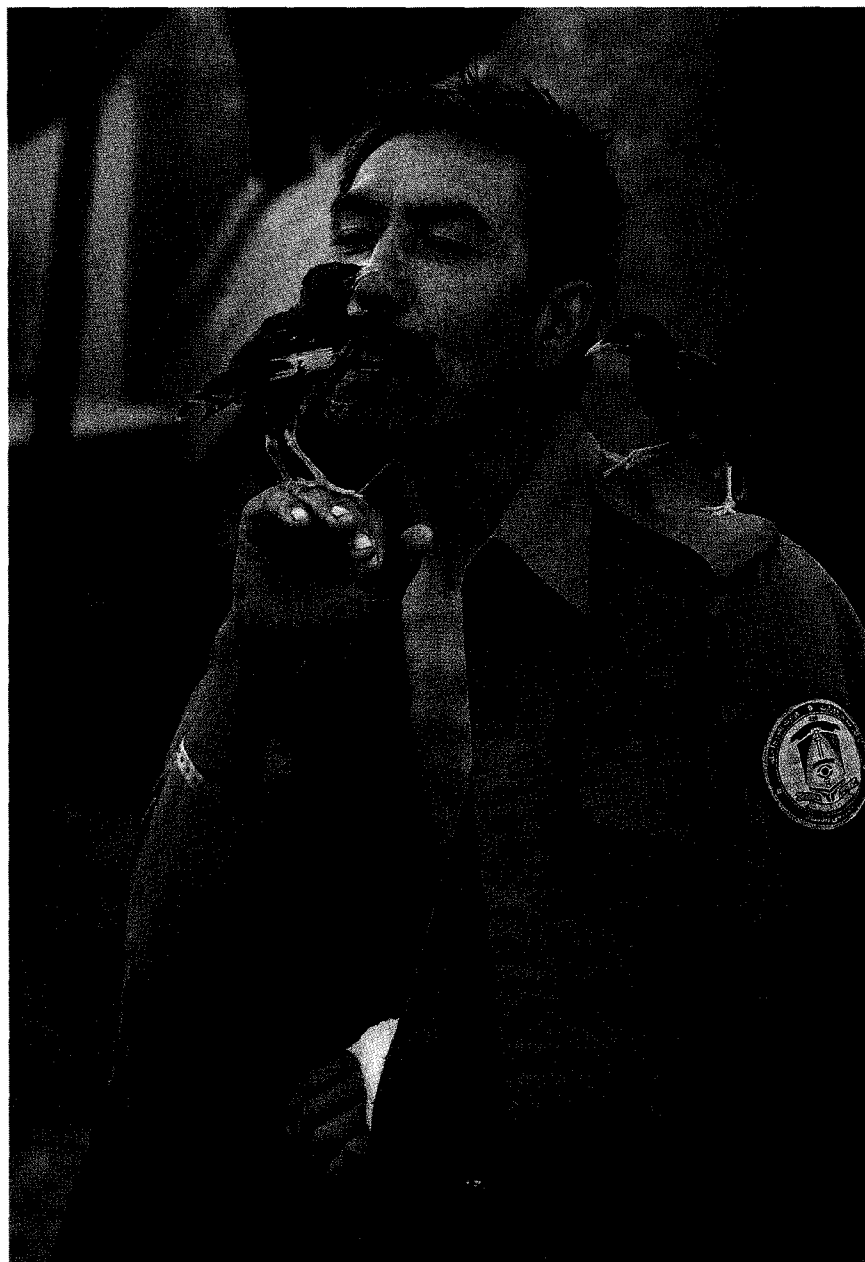
This is already happening, in fits and starts. The CW network essentially subcontracted its Sunday night last year to a private-equity-backed company called Media Rights Capital (the experiment was subsequently scrapped), and NBC announced but has yet to follow through on a similar deal with a production company, possibly for its historically low-rated Saturday nights. We’re not far off from a time, much like at the dawn of television, when, say, Procter & Gamble may lease a night on a major network and be free to do whatever it wants with it.

IN THE SHORT term, this will probably mean fewer traditional (and expensive) television shows in the mold of *Heroes*. The digital revolution has been a great leveler. Blogs work better than newspapers. Small bands with passionate audiences do better relative to their predecessors than does mass-market pap. Cult movies find and sustain audiences. Niche rules over mainstream.

The exceptions (*Twilight*, Pixar movies, *American Idol*, Britney, 24, anything Oprah likes) are huge and will remain so, since people clearly will always like to congregate around shared cultural experiences.

But niche networks like HBO and Showtime may loom even larger than they do now: they’re supported by cable subscription fees, and they’ve smartly anticipated the move away from real-time viewing and made video-on-demand part of their broader scheme. This has allowed those networks not

GALLERY SINGING BIRDS IN PASHMUL by Louie Palu

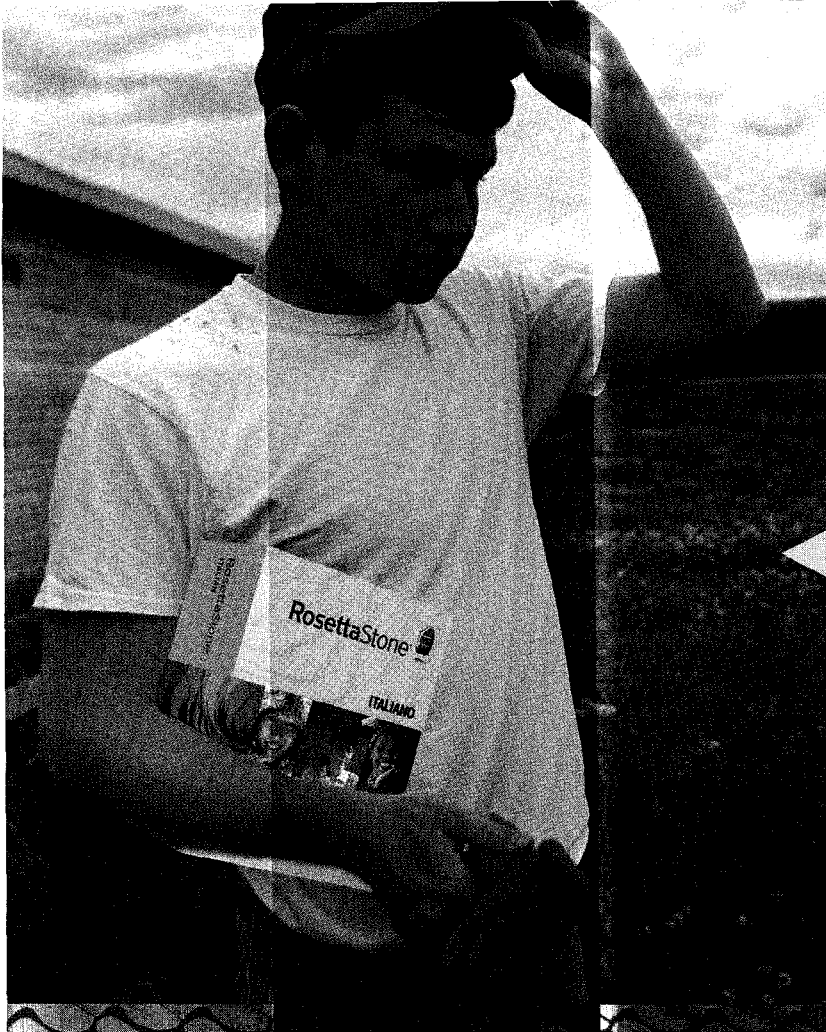


only to continue to produce top-flight scripted shows, but also to promote them with a fervor redolent of the old days of Must-See TV. Surely the current economic meltdown is hurting pay-cable’s revenues, but the business is still awfully juicy. And as the networks increasingly become the domain of the Lord of the Dance, viewers will (I think, and hope) happily continue to pay for quality.

Those who don’t will get what they don’t pay for: not a cultural wasteland,

exactly, but the television equivalent of AM talk radio, which survived the emergence of higher-quality FM radio in the 1970s by reverting to its core strength—cheap, live talk. And the world will tune in, because cheese has its own rewards. When no one’s looking, I might even laugh at Jay Leno’s monologues. ■

Michael Hirschorn is an Atlantic contributing editor and the founder of the TV production company Ish Entertainment.



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predator but prey, trapped
and awaiting a kill shot
that would never come,
because in the next instant
the MiG became a huge
fireball in the sky.”*

—MARK BOWDEN

from “The Last Ace,” beginning on page 58

THE CRASH OF 2008 continues to reverberate loudly nationwide—destroying jobs, bankrupting businesses, and displacing homeowners. But already, it has damaged some places much more severely than others. On the other side of the crisis, America's economic landscape will look very different than it does today. What fate will the coming years hold for New York, Charlotte, Detroit, Las Vegas? Will the suburbs be ineffably changed? Which cities and regions can come back strong? And which will never come back at all?

HOW THE CRASH WILL RESHAPE AMERICA

By Richard Florida

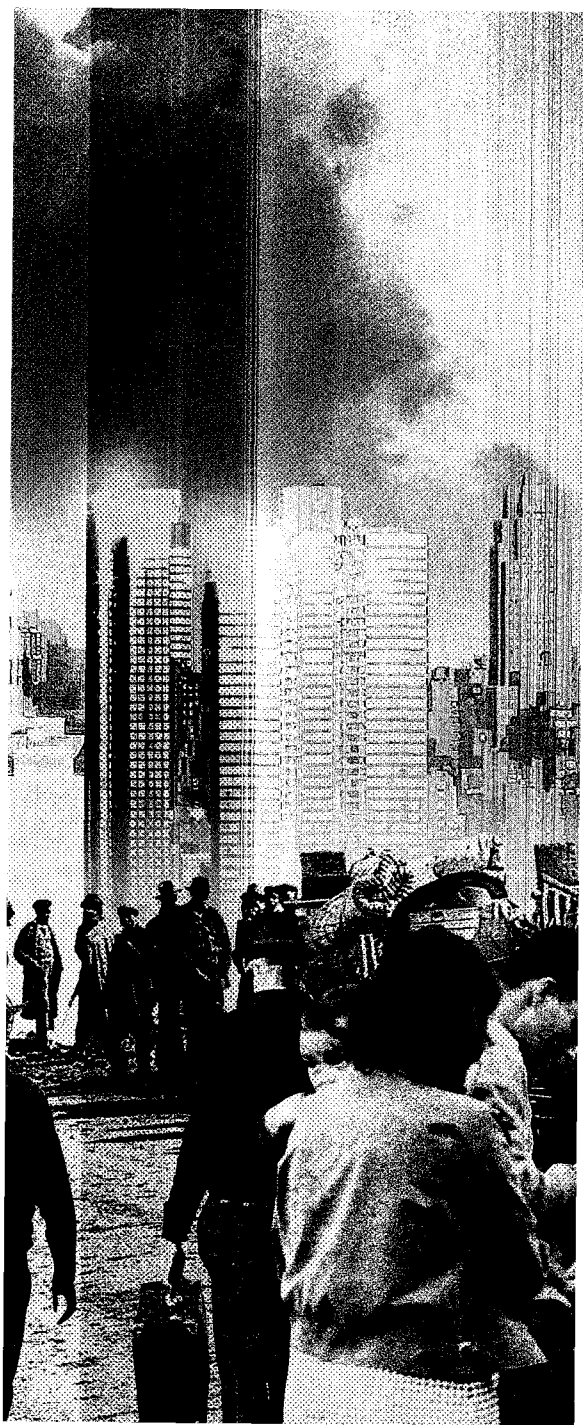
MY FATHER WAS a child of the Great Depression. Born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1921 to Italian immigrant parents, he experienced the economic crisis head-on. He took a job working in an eyeglass factory in the city's Ironbound section in 1934, at age 13, combining his wages with those of his father, mother, and six siblings to make a single-family income. When I was growing up, he spoke often of his memories of breadlines, tent cities, and government-issued clothing. At Christmas, he would tell my brother and me how his parents, unable to afford new toys, had wrapped the same toy steam shovel, year after year, and placed it for him under the tree. In my extended family, my uncles occupied a pecking order based on who had grown up in the roughest

economic circumstances. My Uncle Walter, who went on to earn a master's degree in chemical engineering and eventually became a senior executive at Colgate-Palmolive, came out on top—not because of his academic or career achievements, but because he grew up with the hardest lot.

My father's experiences were broadly shared throughout the country. Although times were perhaps worst in the declining rural areas of the Dust Bowl, every region suffered, and the residents of small towns and big cities alike breathed in the same uncertainty and distress. The Great Depression was a national crisis—and in many ways a nationalizing event. The entire country, it seemed, tuned in to President Roosevelt's fireside chats.

The current economic crisis is unlikely to result in the same kind of shared experience. To be sure, the economic contraction is causing pain just about everywhere. In October,

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less than a month after the financial markets began to melt down, Moody's Investor Services published an assessment of recent economic activity within 381 U.S. metropolitan areas. Three hundred and two were already in deep recession, and 64 more were at risk. Only 15 areas were still expanding. Notable among them were the oil- and natural-resource-rich regions of Texas and Oklahoma, buoyed by energy prices that have since fallen; and the Greater Washington, D.C., region, where government bailouts, the nationalization of financial companies, and fiscal expansion are creating work for lawyers, lobbyists, political scientists, and government contractors.

No place in the United States is likely to escape a long and deep recession. Nonetheless, as the crisis continues to spread outward from New York, through industrial centers like Detroit, and into the Sun Belt, it will undoubtedly settle much more heavily on some places than on others. Some cities and regions will eventually spring back stronger than before. Others may never come back at all. As the crisis deepens, it will permanently and profoundly alter the country's economic landscape. I believe it marks the end of a chapter in American economic history, and indeed, the end of a whole way of life.

GLOBAL CRISES AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

"One thing seems probable to me," said Peer Steinbrück, the German finance minister, in September 2008. As a result of the crisis, "the United States will lose its status as the superpower of the global financial system." You don't have to strain too hard to see the financial crisis as the death knell for a debt-ridden, overconsuming, and underproducing American empire—the fall long prophesied by Paul Kennedy and others.

Big international economic crises—the crash of 1873, the Great Depression—have a way of upending the geopolitical order, and hastening the fall of old powers and the rise of new ones. In *The Post-American World* (published some months before the Wall Street meltdown), Fareed Zakaria argued that modern history's third great power shift was already upon us—the rise of the West in the 15th century and the rise of America in the 19th century being the two previous sea changes.

But Zakaria added that this transition is defined less by American decline than by "the rise of the rest." We're to look forward to a world economy, he wrote, "defined and directed from many places and by many peoples." That's surely true. Yet the course of events since Steinbrück's remarks should give pause to those who believe the mantle of global leadership will soon be passed. The crisis has exposed deep structural problems, not just in the U.S. but worldwide. Europe's model of banking has proved no more resilient than America's, and China has shown that it remains every bit the codependent partner of the United States. The Dow, down more than a third last year, was actually among the world's better-performing stock-market indices. Foreign capital has flooded into the U.S., which apparently remains a safe haven, at least for now, in uncertain times.

It is possible that the United States will enter a period of accelerating relative decline in the coming years, though that's hardly a foregone conclusion—a subject I'll return to later. What's more certain is that the recession, particularly if it turns out to be as long and deep as many now fear, will accelerate the rise and fall of specific places *within* the U.S.—and reverse the fortunes of other cities and regions.

By what they destroy, what they leave standing, what responses they catalyze, and what space they clear for new growth, most big economic shocks ultimately leave the economic landscape transformed. Some of these transformations occur faster and more violently than others. The period after the Great Depression saw the slow but inexorable rise of the suburbs. The economic malaise of the 1970s, on the other hand, found its embodiment in the vertiginous fall of older industrial cities of the Rust Belt, followed by an explosion of growth in the Sun Belt.

The historian Scott Reynolds Nelson has noted that in some respects, today's crisis most closely resembles the "Long Depression," which stretched, by one definition, from 1873 to 1896. It began as a banking crisis brought on by insolvent mortgages and complex financial instruments, and quickly spread to the real economy, leading to mass unemployment that reached 25 percent in New York.

During that crisis, rising industries like railroads, petroleum, and steel were consolidated, old ones failed, and the way was paved for a period of remarkable innovation and industrial growth. In 1870, New England mill towns like Lowell, Lawrence, Manchester, and Springfield were among the country's most productive industrial cities, and America's population overwhelmingly lived in the countryside. By 1900, the economic geography had been transformed from a patchwork of farm plots and small mercantile towns to a landscape increasingly dominated by giant factory cities like Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Buffalo.

How might various cities and regions fare as the crash of 2008 reverberates into 2009, 2010, and beyond? Which places will be spared the worst pain, and which left permanently scarred? Let's consider how the crash and its aftermath might affect the economic landscape in the long run, from coast to coast—beginning with the epicenter of the crisis and the nation's largest city, New York.

WHITHER NEW YORK?

At first glance, few American cities would seem to be more obviously threatened by the crash than New York. The city shed almost 17,000 jobs in the financial industry alone from October 2007 to October 2008, and Wall Street as we've known it has ceased to exist. "Farewell Wall Street, hello Pudong?" begins a recent article by Marcus Gee in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, outlining the possibility that New York's central role in global finance may soon be usurped by Shanghai, Hong Kong, and other Asian and Middle Eastern financial capitals.

This concern seems overheated. In his sweeping history, *Capitals of Capital*, the economic historian Youssef Cassis

MORE ONLINE

For an interview with Richard Florida about the regional impact of the financial crisis, visit www.theatlantic.com/recession.

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chronicles the rise and decline of global financial centers through recent centuries. Though the history is long, it contains little drama: major shifts in capitalist power centers occur at an almost geological pace.

Amsterdam stood at the center of the world's financial system in the 17th century; its place was taken by London in the early 19th century, then New York in the 20th. Across more than three centuries, no other city has topped the list of global financial centers. Financial capitals have "remarkable longevity," Cassis writes, "in spite of the phases of boom and bust in the course of their existence."

The transition from one financial center to another typically lags behind broader shifts in the economic balance of power, Cassis suggests. Although the U.S. displaced England as the world's largest economy well before 1900, it was not until after World War II that New York eclipsed London as the world's preeminent financial center (and even then, the eclipse was not complete; in recent years, London has, by some measures, edged out New York). As Asia has risen, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Singapore have become major financial centers—yet in size and scope, they still trail New York and London by large margins.

In finance, "there is a huge network and agglomeration effect," former assistant U.S. Treasury secretary Edwin Truman told *The Christian Science Monitor* in October—an advantage that comes from having a large critical mass of financial professionals, covering many different specialties, along with lawyers, accountants, and others to support them, all in close physical proximity. It is extremely difficult to build these dense networks anew, and very hard for up-and-coming cities to take a position at the height of global finance without them. "Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, and Tokyo are more important than they were 20 years ago," Truman said. "But will they reach London and New York's dominance in another 20 years? I suspect not." Hong Kong, for instance, has a highly developed IPO market, but lacks many of the other capabilities—such as bond, foreign-exchange, and commodities trading—that make New York and London global financial powerhouses.

"A crucial contributory factor in the financial centres' development over the last two centuries, and even longer," writes Cassis, "is the arrival of new talent to replenish their energy and their capacity to innovate." All in all, most places in Asia and the Middle East are still not as inviting to foreign professionals as New York or London. Tokyo is a wonderful city, but Japan remains among the least open of the advanced economies, and admits fewer immigrants than any other member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a group of 30 market-oriented democracies. Singapore remains for the time being a top-down, socially engineered society. Dubai placed 44th in a recent ranking of global financial centers, near Edinburgh, Bangkok, Lisbon, and Prague. New York's openness to talent and its critical mass of it—in and

outside of finance and banking—will ensure that it remains a global financial center.

IN THE SHORT RUN, the most troubling question for New York is not how much of its finance industry will move to other places, but how much will simply vanish altogether. At the height of the recent bubble, Greater New York depended on the financial sector for roughly 22 percent of local wages. But most economists agree that by then the financial economy had become bloated and overdeveloped. Thomas Philippon, a finance professor at New York University, reckons that nationally, the share of GDP coming from finance will probably be reduced from its recent peak of 8.3 percent to perhaps 7 percent—I suspect it may fall farther, to perhaps as little as 5 percent, roughly its contribution a generation ago. In either case, it will be a big reduction, and a sizable portion of it will come out of Manhattan.

Lean times undoubtedly lie ahead for New York. But perhaps not as lean as you'd think—and certainly not as lean as those that many lesser financial outposts are likely to experience. Financial positions account for only about 8 percent of the New York area's jobs, not too far off the national average of 5.5 percent. By contrast, they make up 28 percent of all jobs in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois; 18 percent in Des Moines; 13 percent in Hartford; 10 percent in both Sioux Falls,

South Dakota, and Charlotte, North Carolina. Omaha, Nebraska; Macon, Georgia; and Columbus, Ohio, all have a greater percentage of population working in the financial sector than New York does.

New York is much, much more than a financial center. It has been the nation's largest city for roughly two centuries, and today sits in America's largest metropolitan area, as the hub of the country's largest mega-region. It is home to a diverse and innovative economy built around a broad range of creative industries, from media to design to arts and entertainment. It is home to high-tech companies like Bloomberg, and boasts a thriving Google outpost in its Chelsea neighborhood. Elizabeth Currid's book, *The Warhol Economy*, provides detailed evidence of New York's diversity. Currid measured the concentration of different types of jobs in New York relative to their incidence in the U.S. economy as

a whole. By this measure, New York is more of a mecca for fashion designers, musicians, film directors, artists, and—yes—psychiatrists than for financial professionals.

The great urbanist Jane Jacobs was among the first to identify cities' diverse economic and social structures as the true engines of growth. Although the specialization identified by Adam Smith creates powerful efficiency gains, Jacobs argued that the jostling of many different professions and different types of people, all in a dense environment, is an essential spur to innovation—to the creation of things that are truly new. And innovation, in the long run, is what keeps cities vital and relevant.

When a place gets boring, even the rich people leave. With the hegemony of the investment bankers over, New York now stands a better chance of avoiding that sterile fate.

In this sense, the financial crisis may ultimately help New York by reenergizing its creative economy. The extraordinary income gains of investment bankers, traders, and hedge-fund managers over the past two decades skewed the city's economy in some unhealthy ways. In 2005, I asked a top-ranking official at a major investment bank whether the city's rising real-estate prices were affecting his company's ability to attract global talent. He responded simply: "We are the cause, not the effect, of the real-estate bubble." (As it turns out, he was only half right.) Stratospheric real-estate prices have made New York less diverse over time, and arguably less stimulating. When I asked Jacobs some years ago about the effects of escalating real-estate prices on creativity, she told me, "When a place gets boring, even the rich people leave." With the hegemony of the investment bankers over, New York now stands a better chance of avoiding that sterile fate.

AMERICA'S "FAST" CITIES: CRISIS AND REINVENTION

In his 2005 book, *The World Is Flat*, Thomas Friedman argues, essentially, that the global economic playing field has been leveled, and that anyone, anywhere, can now innovate, produce, and compete on a par with, say, workers in Seattle or entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley. But this argument isn't quite right, and doesn't accurately describe the evolution of the global economy in recent years.

In fact, as I described in an earlier article for this magazine ("The World Is Spiky," October 2005), place still matters in the modern economy—and the competitive advantage of the world's most successful city-regions seems to be growing, not shrinking. To understand how the current crisis is likely to affect different places in the United States, it's important to understand the forces that have been slowly remaking our economic landscape for a generation or more.

Worldwide, people are crowding into a discrete number of mega-regions, systems of multiple cities and their surrounding suburban rings like the Boston–New York–Washington Corridor. In North America, these mega-regions include Sun Belt centers like the Char-Lanta Corridor, Northern and Southern California, the Texas Triangle of Houston–San Antonio–Dallas, and Southern Florida's Tampa–Orlando–Miami area; the Pacific Northwest's Cascadia, stretching from Portland through Seattle to Vancouver; and both Greater Chicago and Tor-Buff-Chester in the old Rust Belt. Internationally, these mega-regions include Greater London, Greater Tokyo, Europe's Am-Brus-Twerp, China's Shanghai–Beijing Corridor, and India's Bangalore–Mumbai area. Economic output is ever-more concentrated in these places as well. The world's 40 largest mega-regions, which are home to some 18 percent of the world's population, produce two-thirds of global economic output and nearly 9 in 10 new patented innovations.

Some (though not all) of these mega-regions have a clear hub, and these hubs are likely to be better buffered from the

crash than most cities, because of their size, diversity, and regional role. Chicago has emerged as a center for industrial management and has rolled up many of the functions, such as finance and law, once performed in smaller midwestern centers. Los Angeles has a broad, diverse economy with global strength in media and entertainment. Miami, which is being hit hard by the collapse of the real-estate bubble, nonetheless remains the commercial center for the large South Florida mega-region, and a major financial center for Latin America. Each of these places is the financial and commercial core of a large mega-region with tens of millions of people and hundreds of billions of dollars in output. That's not going to change as a result of the crisis.

Along with the rise of mega-regions, a second phenomenon is also reshaping the economic geography of the United States and the world. The ability of different cities and regions to attract highly educated people—or human capital—has diverged, according to research by the Harvard economists Edward Glaeser and Christopher Berry, among others. Thirty years ago, educational attainment was spread relatively uniformly throughout the country, but that's no longer the case. Cities like Seattle, San Francisco, Austin, Raleigh, and Boston now have two or three times the concentration of college graduates of Akron or Buffalo. Among people with postgraduate degrees, the disparities are wider still. The geographic sorting of people by ability and educational attainment, on this scale, is unprecedented.

The University of Chicago economist and Nobel laureate Robert Lucas declared that the spillovers in knowledge that result from talent-clustering are the main cause of economic growth. Well-educated professionals and creative workers who live together in dense ecosystems, interacting directly,

generate ideas and turn them into products and services faster than talented people in other places can. There is no evidence that globalization or the Internet has changed that. Indeed, as globalization has increased the financial return on innovation by widening the consumer market, the pull of innovative places, already dense with highly talented workers, has only grown stronger, creating a snowball effect. Talent-rich ecosystems are not easy to replicate, and to realize their full economic value, talented and ambitious people increasingly need to live within them.

Big, talent-attracting places benefit from accelerated rates of "urban metabolism," according to a pioneering theory of urban

evolution developed by a multidisciplinary team of researchers affiliated with the Santa Fe Institute. The rate at which living things convert food into energy—their metabolic rate—tends to slow as organisms increase in size. But when the Santa Fe team examined trends in innovation, patent activity, wages, and GDP, they found that successful cities, unlike biological organisms, actually get faster as they grow. In order to grow bigger and overcome diseconomies of scale like congestion and rising housing and business costs, cities must become more efficient, innovative, and productive. The

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researchers dubbed the extraordinarily rapid metabolic rate that successful cities are able to achieve “super-linear” scaling. “By almost any measure,” they wrote, “the larger a city’s population, the greater the innovation and wealth creation per person.” Places like New York with finance and media, Los Angeles with film and music, and Silicon Valley with high tech are all examples of high-metabolism places.

Metabolism and talent-clustering are important to the fortunes of U.S. city-regions in good times, but they’re even more so when times get tough. It’s not that “fast” cities are immune to the failure of businesses, large or small. (One of the great lessons of the 1873 crisis—and of this one so far—is that when credit freezes up and a long slump follows, companies can fail unpredictably, no matter where they are.) It’s that unlike many other places, they can overcome business failures with relative ease, reabsorbing their talented workers, growing nascent businesses, founding new ones.

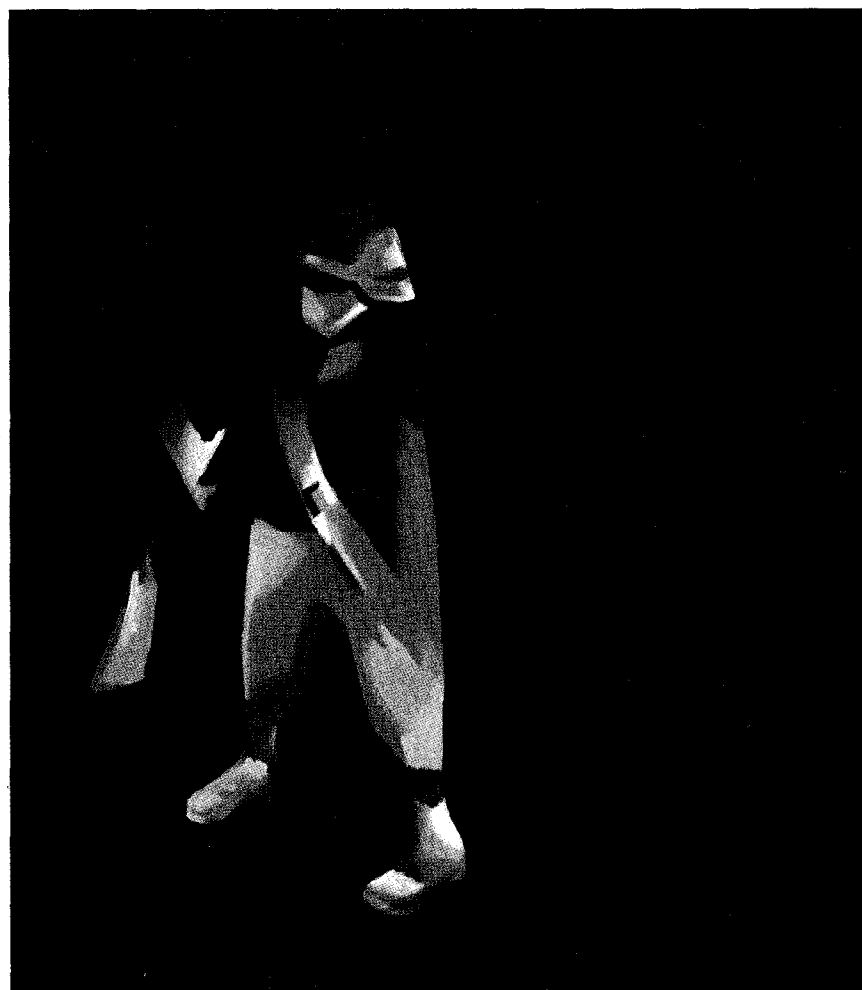
Economic crises tend to reinforce and accelerate the underlying, long-term trends within an economy. Our economy is in the midst of a fundamental long-term transformation—similar to that of the late 19th century, when people streamed off farms and into new and rising industrial cities. In this case, the economy is shifting away from manufacturing and toward idea-driven creative industries—and that, too, favors America’s talent-rich, fast-metabolizing places.

THE LAST CRISIS OF THE FACTORY TOWNS

Sadly and unjustly, the places likely to suffer most from the crash—especially in the long run—are the ones least associated with high finance. While the crisis may have begun in New York, it will likely find its fullest bloom in the interior of the country—in older, manufacturing regions whose heydays are long past and in newer, shallow-rooted Sun Belt communities whose recent booms have been fueled in part by real-estate speculation, overdevelopment, and fictitious housing wealth. These typically less affluent places are likely to become less wealthy still in the coming years, and will continue to struggle long after the mega-regional hubs and creative cities have put the crisis behind them.

The Rust Belt in particular looks likely to shed vast numbers of jobs, and some of its cities and towns, from Cleveland to St. Louis to Buffalo to Detroit, will have a hard time recovering. Since 1950, the manufacturing sector has shrunk from 32 percent of nonfarm employment to just 10 percent. This decline is the result of long-term trends—increasing foreign

GALLERY A FIRM STANCE by Thomas Fuchs



competition and, especially, the relentless replacement of people with machines—that look unlikely to abate. But the job losses themselves have proceeded not steadily, but rather in sharp bursts, as recessions have killed off older plants and resulted in mass layoffs that are never fully reversed during subsequent upswings.

In November, nationwide unemployment in manufacturing and production occupations was already 9.4 percent. Compare that with the professional occupations, where it was just a little over 3 percent. According to an analysis done by Michael Mandel, the chief economist at *BusinessWeek*, jobs in the “tangible” sector—that is, production, construction, extraction, and transport—declined by nearly 1.8 million between December 2007 and November 2008, while those in the intangible sector—what I call the “creative class” of scientists, engineers, managers, and professionals—increased by more than 500,000. Both sorts of jobs are regionally concentrated. Paul Krugman has noted that the worst of the crisis, so far at least, can be seen in a “Slump Belt,” heavy with manufacturing centers, running from the industrial Midwest down into the Carolinas. Large swaths of the Northeast, with its professional and creative centers, have been better insulated.

Perhaps no major city in the U.S. today looks more beleaguered than Detroit, where in October the average home price was \$18,513, and some 45,000 properties were in some form of foreclosure. A recent listing of tax foreclosures in Wayne County, which encompasses Detroit, ran to 137 pages in the *Detroit Free Press*. The city's public school system, facing a budget deficit of \$408 million, was taken over by the state in December; dozens of schools have been closed since 2005 because of declining enrollment. Just 10 percent of Detroit's adult residents are college graduates, and in December the city's jobless rate was 21 percent.

To say the least, Detroit is not well positioned to absorb fresh blows. The city has of course been declining for a long time. But if the area's auto headquarters, parts manufacturers, and remaining auto-manufacturing jobs should vanish, it's hard to imagine anything replacing them.

When work disappears, city populations don't always decline as fast as you might expect. Detroit, astonishingly, is still the 11th-largest city in the U.S. "If you no longer can sell your property, how can you move elsewhere?" said Robin Boyle, an urban-planning professor at Wayne State University, in a December Associated Press article. But then he answered his own question: "Some people just switch out the lights and leave—property values have gone so low, walking away is no longer such a difficult option."

Perhaps Detroit has reached a tipping point, and will become a ghost town. I'd certainly expect it to shrink faster in the next few years than it has in the past few. But more than likely, many people will stay—those with no means and few obvious prospects elsewhere, those with close family ties nearby, some number of young professionals and creative types looking to take advantage of the city's low housing prices. Still, as its population density dips further, the city's struggle to provide services and prevent blight across an ever-emptier landscape will only intensify.

That's the challenge that many Rust Belt cities share: managing population decline without becoming blighted. The task is doubly difficult because as the manufacturing industry has shrunk, the local high-end services—finance, law, consulting—that it once supported have diminished as well, absorbed by bigger regional hubs and globally connected cities. In Chicago, for instance, the country's 50 biggest law firms grew by 2,130 lawyers from 1984 to 2006, according to William Henderson and Arthur Alderson of Indiana University. Throughout the rest of the Midwest, these firms added a total of just 169 attorneys. Jones Day, founded in 1893 and today one of the country's largest law firms, no longer considers its Cleveland office "headquarters"—that's in Washington, D.C.—but rather its "founding office."

Many second-tier midwestern cities have tried to reinvent themselves in different ways, with varying degrees of success. Pittsburgh, for instance, has sought to reimagine itself as a high-tech center, and has met with more success than just about anywhere else. Still, its population has declined from a high of almost 700,000 in the mid-20th century to roughly

300,000 today. There will be fewer manufacturing jobs on the other side of the crisis, and the U.S. economic landscape will be more uneven—"spikier"—as a result. Many of the old industrial centers will be further diminished, perhaps permanently so.

THAT'S NOT TO SAY that every factory town is locked into decline. You need only look at the geographic pattern of December's Senate vote on the auto bailout to realize that some places, mostly in the South, would benefit directly from the bankruptcy of GM or Chrysler and the closure of auto plants in the Rust Belt. Georgetown, Kentucky; Smyrna, Tennessee; Canton, Mississippi: these are a few of the many small cities, stretching from South Carolina and Georgia all the way to Texas, that have benefited from the establishment, over the years, of plants that manufacture foreign cars. Those benefits could grow if the Big Three were to become, say, the Big Two.

This phenomenon, a sort of lottery whereby some places win merely by outlasting others, will not be limited to towns built around automobiles, or even around manufacturing. As the recession continues and large companies in a variety of industries fail, their remaining competitors may grow stronger, along with the places where those competitors are situated. Charlotte, North Carolina, offers an interesting case study. The financial crisis left one of the city's two big banks, Wachovia, ailing; this fall, Wachovia was acquired by

San Francisco-based Wells Fargo, in a deal that will cost the city many thousands of jobs. But things could have been much worse; the deal also preserved many jobs. What's more, at roughly the same time, Bank of America, Charlotte's other large bank (and the biggest bank in the U.S.) bought Merrill Lynch for pennies on the dollar.

A business truism holds that when your competitors are retrenching, it's a great time to grow your market share. Deborah Strumsky, an economist at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, told me she believes that in the end, both Charlotte's banking industry and Charlotte itself will emerge from the crisis all the stronger: "The Wells Fargo deal has saved thousands

of jobs by keeping Wachovia afloat. More importantly, Bank of America has taken to the banking crisis like a shopaholic with a new credit card; it has been bargain-hunting and cutting some astonishing deals. Bank of America will come out the other side far better than in any fantasy it might have entertained previously."

In recent years, Charlotte's leaders have made some smart decisions about how to attract businesses and professionals, enabling the city to grow into the nation's second-largest traditional banking center; in the lottery of business failure and consolidation, it was well positioned to win. But it was also lucky, and last fall, it escaped losing, big-time, by no more than a hair's breadth. Overall, the roster of places that benefit from the failure of their champions' rivals will probably be

When work disappears, city populations don't always decline as fast as you'd expect. Astonishingly, Detroit is still the 11th-largest city in the U.S.

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pretty short, and the names on the roster somewhat unpredictable. Especially among cities built around declining industries, more places will be weakened than strengthened; as with all lotteries, most players will lose.

CITIES IN THE SAND: THE END OF EASY EXPANSION

For a generation or more, no swath of the United States has grown more madly than the Sun Belt. Of course, the area we call the "Sun Belt" is vast, and the term is something of a catch-all: the cities and metropolitan areas within it have grown for disparate reasons. Los Angeles is a mecca for media and entertainment; San Jose and Austin developed significant, innovative high-tech industries; Houston became a hub for energy production; Nashville developed a unique niche in low-cost music recording and production; Charlotte emerged as a center for cost-effective banking and low-end finance.

But in the heady days of the housing bubble, some Sun Belt cities—Phoenix and Las Vegas are the best examples—developed economies centered largely on real estate and construction. With sunny weather and plenty of flat, empty land, they got caught in a classic boom cycle. Although these places drew tourists, retirees, and some industry—firms seeking bigger footprints at lower costs—much of the cities' development came from, well, development itself. At a minimum, these places will take a long, long time to regain the ground they've recently lost in local wealth and housing values. It's not unthinkable that some of them could be in for an extended period of further decline.

To an uncommon degree, the economic boom in these cities was propelled by housing appreciation: as prices rose, more people moved in, seeking inexpensive lifestyles and the opportunity to get in on the real-estate market where it was rising, but still affordable. Local homeowners pumped more and more capital out of their houses as well, taking out home-equity loans and injecting money into the local economy in the form of home improvements and demand for retail goods and low-level services. Cities grew, tax coffers filled, spending continued, more people arrived. Yet the boom itself neither followed nor resulted in the development of sustainable, scalable, highly productive industries or services. It was fueled and funded by housing, and housing was its primary product. Whole cities and metro regions became giant Ponzi schemes.

Phoenix, for instance, grew from 983,403 people in 1990 to 1,552,259 in 2007. One of its suburbs, Mesa, now has nearly half a million residents, more than Pittsburgh, Cleveland, or Miami. As housing starts and housing prices rose, so did tax revenues, and a major capital-spending boom occurred throughout the Greater Phoenix area. Arizona State University built a new downtown Phoenix campus, and the city expanded its convention center and constructed a 20-mile light-rail system connecting Phoenix, Mesa, and Tempe.

And then the bubble burst. From October 2007 through October 2008, the Phoenix area registered the largest decline in housing values in the country: 32.7 percent. (Las Vegas was just a whisker behind, at 31.7 percent. Housing in the New York region, by contrast, fell by just 7.5 percent over the same period.) Overstretched and overbuilt, the region is now

experiencing a fiscal double whammy, as its many retirees—some 21 percent of its residents are older than 55—have seen their retirement savings decimated. Mortgages Limited, the state's largest private commercial lender, filed for bankruptcy last summer. The city is running a \$200 million budget deficit, which is only expected to grow. Last fall, the city government petitioned for federal funds to help it deal with the financial crisis. "We had a big bubble here, and it burst," Anthony Sanders, a professor of economics and finance at ASU, told *USA Today* in December. "We've taken Kevin Costner's Field of Dreams and now it's Field of Screams. If you build it, nobody comes."

Will people wash out of these places as fast as they washed in, leaving empty sprawl and all the ills that accompany it? Will these cities gradually attract more businesses and industries, allowing them to build more-diverse and more-resilient economies? Or will they subsist on tourism—which may be meager for quite some time—and on the Social Security checks of their retirees? No matter what, their character and atmosphere are likely to change radically.

THE LIMITS OF SUBURBAN GROWTH

Every phase or epoch of capitalism has its own distinct geography, or what economic geographers call the "spatial fix" for the era. The physical character of the economy—the way land is used, the location of homes and businesses, the physical infrastructure that ties everything together—shapes consumption, production, and innovation. As the economy grows and evolves, so too must the landscape.

To a surprising degree, the causes of this crash are geographic in nature, and they point out a whole system of economic organization and growth that has reached its limit. Positioning the economy to grow strongly in the coming decades will require not just fiscal stimulus or industrial reform; it will require a new kind of geography as well, a new spatial fix for the next chapter of American economic history.

Suburbanization was the spatial fix for the industrial age—the geographic expression of mass production and the early credit economy. Henry Ford's automobiles had been rolling off assembly lines since 1913, but "Fordism," the combination of mass production and mass consumption to create national prosperity, didn't emerge as a full-blown economic and social model until the 1930s and the advent of Roosevelt's New Deal programs.

Before the Great Depression, only a minority of Americans owned a home. But in the 1930s and '40s, government policies brought about longer-term mortgages, which lowered payments and enabled more people to buy a house. Fannie Mae was created to purchase those mortgages and lubricate the system. And of course the tax deduction on mortgage-interest payments (which had existed since 1913, when the federal income-tax system was created) privileged house purchases over other types of spending. Between 1940 and 1960, the homeownership rate rose from 44 percent to 62 percent.

Demand for houses was symbiotic with demand for cars, and both were helped along by federal highway construction, among other infrastructure projects that subsidized a new suburban lifestyle and in turn fueled demand for all manner of household goods. More recently, innovations in finance

like adjustable-rate mortgages and securitized subprime loans expanded homeownership further and kept demand high. By 2004, a record 69.2 percent of American families owned their home.

For the generation that grew up during the Depression and was inclined to pinch pennies, policies that encouraged freer spending were sensible enough—they allowed the economy to grow faster. But as younger generations, weaned on credit, followed, and credit availability increased, the system got out of hand. Housing, meanwhile, became an ever-more-central part of the American Dream: for many people, as the recent housing bubble grew, owning a home came to represent not just an end in itself, but a means to financial independence.

On one level, the crisis has demonstrated what everyone has known for a long time: Americans have been living beyond their means, using illusory housing wealth and huge slugs of foreign capital to consume far more than we've produced. The crash surely signals the end to that; the adjustment, while painful, is necessary.

But another crucial aspect of the crisis has been largely overlooked, and it might ultimately prove more important. Because America's tendency to overconsume and under-save has been intimately intertwined with our postwar spatial fix—that is, with housing and suburbanization—the shape of the economy has been badly distorted, from where people live, to where investment flows, to what's produced. Unless we make fundamental policy changes to eliminate these distortions, the economy is likely to face worsening handicaps in the years ahead.

Suburbanization—and the sprawling growth it propelled—made sense for a time. The cities of the early and mid-20th century were dirty, sooty, smelly, and crowded, and commuting from the first, close-in suburbs was fast and easy. And as manufacturing became more technologically stable and product lines matured during the postwar boom, suburban growth dovetailed nicely with the pattern of industrial growth. Businesses began opening new plants in green-field locations that featured cheaper land and labor; management saw no reason to continue making now-standardized products in the expensive urban locations where they'd first been developed and sold. Work was outsourced to then-new suburbs and the emerging areas of the Sun Belt, whose connections to bigger cities by the highway system afforded rapid, low-cost distribution. This process brought the Sun Belt economies (which had lagged since the Civil War) into modern times, and sustained a long boom for the United States as a whole.

But that was then; the economy is different now. It no longer revolves around simply making and moving things. Instead, it depends on generating and transporting ideas. The places that thrive today are those with the highest velocity of ideas, the highest density of talented and creative people, the highest rate of metabolism. *Velocity* and *density* are not words that many people use when describing the suburbs. The economy is driven by key urban areas; a different geography is required.

Suburbanization—and the sprawling growth it propelled—made sense for a time. But that was then; the economy is different now. A new geography is required.

THE NEXT ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

The housing bubble was the ultimate expression, and perhaps the last gasp, of an economic system some 80 years in the making, and now well past its “sell-by” date. The bubble encouraged massive, unsustainable growth in places where land was cheap and the real-estate economy dominant. It encouraged low-density sprawl, which is ill-fitted to a creative, postindustrial economy. And not least, it created a workforce too often stuck in place, anchored by houses that cannot be profitably sold, at a time when flexibility and mobility are of great importance.

So how do we move past the bubble, the crash, and an aging, obsolescent model of economic life? What's the right spatial fix for the economy today, and how do we achieve it?

The solution begins with the removal of homeownership from its long-privileged place at the center of the U.S. economy. Substantial incentives for homeownership (from tax breaks to artificially low mortgage-interest rates) distort demand, encouraging people to buy bigger houses than they otherwise would. That means less spending on medical technology, or software, or alternative energy—the sectors and products that could drive U.S. growth and exports in

the coming years. Artificial demand for bigger houses also skews residential patterns, leading to excessive low-density suburban growth. The measures that prop up this demand should be eliminated.

If anything, our government policies should encourage renting, not buying. Homeownership occupies a central place in the American Dream primarily because decades of policy have put it there. A recent study by Grace Wong, an economist at the Wharton School of Business, shows that, controlling for income and demographics, homeowners are no happier than renters, nor do they report lower levels of stress or higher levels of self-esteem.

And while homeownership has some social benefits—a higher level of civic engagement is one—it is costly to the economy. The economist Andrew Oswald has demonstrated that in both the United States and Europe, those places with higher homeownership rates also suffer from higher unemployment. Homeownership, Oswald found, is a more important predictor of unemployment than rates of unionization or the generosity of welfare benefits. Too often, it ties people to declining or blighted locations, and forces them into work—if they can find it—that is a poor match for their interests and abilities.

As homeownership rates have risen, our society has become less nimble: in the 1950s and 1960s, Americans were nearly twice as likely to move in a given year as they are today. Last year fewer Americans moved, as a percentage of the population, than in any year since the Census Bureau started tracking address changes, in the late 1940s. This sort of creeping rigidity in the labor market is a bad sign for the economy, particularly in a time when businesses, industries, and regions are rising and falling quickly.

The foreclosure crisis creates a real opportunity here. Instead of resisting foreclosures, the government should seek to facilitate them in ways that can minimize pain and disruption. Banks that take back homes, for instance, could be required to offer to rent each home to the previous homeowner, at market rates—which are typically lower than mortgage payments—for some number of years. (At the end of that period, the former homeowner could be given the option to repurchase the home at the prevailing market price.) A bigger, healthier rental market, with more choices, would make renting a more attractive option for many people; it would also make the economy as a whole more flexible and responsive.

Next, we need to encourage growth in the regions and cities that are best positioned to compete in the coming decades: the great mega-regions that already power the economy, and the smaller, talent-attracting innovation centers inside them—places like Silicon Valley, Boulder, Austin, and the North Carolina Research Triangle.

Whatever our government policies, the coming decades will likely see a further clustering of output, jobs, and innovation in a smaller number of bigger cities and city-regions. But properly shaping that growth will be one of the government's biggest challenges. In part, we need to ensure that key cities and regions continue to circulate people, goods, and ideas quickly and efficiently. This in itself will be no small task; increasing congestion threatens to slowly sap some of these city-regions of their vitality.

Just as important, though, we need to make elite cities and key mega-regions more attractive and affordable for all of America's classes, not just the upper crust. High housing costs in these cities and in the more convenient suburbs around them, along with congested sprawl farther afield, have conspired to drive lower-income Americans away from these places over the past 30 years. This is profoundly unhealthy for our society.

In his forthcoming book, *The Wealth of Cities*, my University of Toronto colleague Chris Kennedy shows that only wholesale structural changes, from major upgrades in infrastructure to new housing patterns to big shifts in consumption, allow places to recover from severe economic crises and to resume rapid expansion. London laid the groundwork for its later commercial dominance by changing its building code and widening its streets after the catastrophic fire of 1666. The United States rose to economic preeminence by periodically developing entirely new systems of infrastructure—from canals and railroads to modern water-and-sewer systems to federal highways. Each played a major role in shaping and enabling whole eras of growth.

The Obama administration has declared its intention to open the federal government's pocketbook wide to help us get through this recession, and infrastructure spending seems poised to play a key role. Done right, such spending could position the United States for the next round of growth. But that will entail more than patching up roads and bridges.

If there is one constant in the history of capitalist development, it is the ever-more-intensive use of space. Today, we need to begin making smarter use of both our urban spaces and the suburban rings that surround them—packing in more people, more affordably, while at the same time improving

their quality of life. That means liberal zoning and building codes within cities to allow more residential development, more mixed-use development in suburbs and cities alike, the in-filling of suburban cores near rail links, new investment in rail, and congestion pricing for travel on our roads. Not everyone wants to live in city centers, and the suburbs are not about to disappear. But we can do a much better job of connecting suburbs to cities and to each other, and allowing regions to grow bigger and denser without losing their velocity.

Finally, we need to be clear that ultimately, we can't stop the decline of some places, and that we would be foolish to try. Places like Pittsburgh have shown that a city can stay vibrant as it shrinks, by redeveloping its core to attract young professionals and creative types, and by cultivating high-growth services and industries. And in limited ways, we can help faltering cities to manage their decline better, and to sustain better lives for the people who stay in them.

But different eras favor different places, along with the industries and lifestyles those places embody. Band-Aids and bailouts cannot change that. Neither auto-company rescue packages nor policies designed to artificially prop up housing prices will position the country for renewed growth, at least not of the sustainable variety. We need to let demand for the key products and lifestyles of the old order fall, and begin building a new economy, based on a new geography.

What will this geography look like? It will likely be sparser in the Midwest and also, ultimately, in those parts of the Southeast that are dependent on manufacturing. Its suburbs will be thinner and its houses, perhaps, smaller. Some of its southwestern cities will grow less quickly. Its great mega-regions will rise farther upward and extend farther outward. It will feature a lower rate of homeownership, and a more mobile population of renters. In short, it will be a more concentrated geography, one that allows more people to mix more freely and interact more efficiently in a discrete number of dense, innovative mega-regions and creative cities. Serendipitously, it will be a landscape suited to a world in which petroleum is no longer cheap by any measure. But most of all, it will be a landscape that can accommodate and accelerate invention, innovation, and creation—the activities in which the U.S. still holds a big competitive advantage.

The Stanford economist Paul Romer famously said, "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste." The United States, whatever its flaws, has seldom wasted its crises in the past. On the contrary, it has used them, time and again, to reinvent itself, clearing away the old and making way for the new. Throughout U.S. history, adaptability has been perhaps the best and most quintessential of American attributes. Over the course of the 19th century's Long Depression, the country remade itself from an agricultural power into an industrial one. After the Great Depression, it discovered a new way of living, working, and producing, which contributed to an unprecedented period of mass prosperity. At critical moments, Americans have always looked forward, not back, and surprised the world with our resilience. Can we do it again? ■

*Richard Florida is the author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* and the director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management.*

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so complete for so long that we take it for granted. For the rare use of the aerial-combat skills of a man like Cesar, more air-to-air kills than any other active-duty fighter pilot—Russia, China, India, North Korea, and Pakistan all inferior to those of the F-15, the backbone of American air power. We can stock the Air Force with the expensive technological superiority at great expense to our Treasury. Or we can let the supremacy be paid in the blood of men like Rodriguez.

FAST ACE

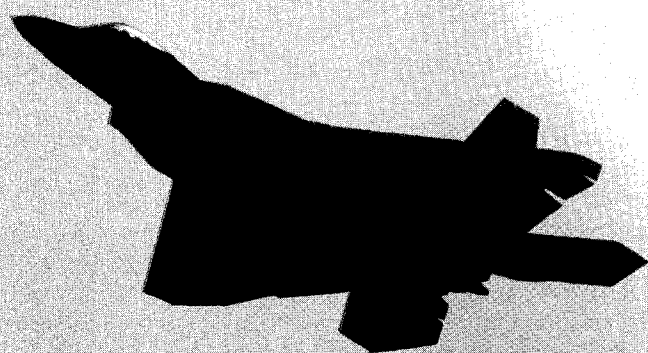
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“So this is an artist’s rendering?”

“No,” said Rodriguez. “That’s actually the real picture.”

A special-operations team combed the Iraqi MiG’s crash site, and this was one of the items salvaged, the last millisecond of incoming data from the doomed Iraqi pilot’s HUD, or head-up display. It was the final splash of light on his retinas, probably arriving too late for his brain to process before being vaporized with the rest of his corporeal frame. Pilots like Rodriguez don’t romanticize such exploits. These are strictly matter-of-fact men from a world where war is work, and life and death hang on a rapidly and precisely calibrated reality, an attitude captured by the flat caption mounted on the frame: THIS IS AN AIM-7 AIR-TO-AIR MISSILE SHOT FROM

ENFORCED BY THE U.S. AIR FORCE



but it is one with no reset button, no next level. It is played for keeps.

When Rodriguez retired two years ago from the Air Force as a colonel, his three air-to-air kills (two over Iraq in 1991 and one over Kosovo) were the most of any American fighter pilot on active duty. That number may seem paltry alongside the 26 enemy planes downed by Eddie Rickenbacker in World War I, or the 40 notched by Richard Bong in World War II, or the 34 by Francis Gabreski across World War II and Korea. Rodriguez's total was two shy of the threshold number for the honorific *ace*, yet his three made him the closest thing to an ace in the modern U.S. Air Force.

This says more, of course, about the nature of American air power than it does about the skills of our pilots. It's hard to call what happens in the sky over a battlefield today "single combat." More than ever, an air war is a group effort involving skilled professionals and technological marvels, from the ground to Earth orbit. But within the world of military aviation there remains a hierarchy of cool, and fighter jocks still own the highest rung. The word *ace* denotes singularity, the number *one*, he who stands alone at the top. Its mystique still attracts the most-ambitious young aviators, even if nowadays the greatest danger most of them face is simply flying the aircraft at supersonic speed.

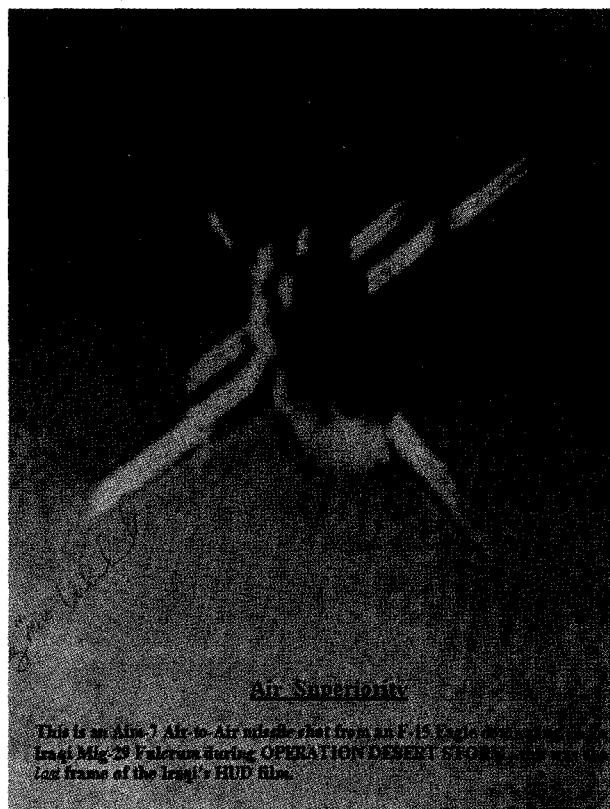
American pilots haven't shot down many enemy jets in modern times, because few nations have dared rise to the challenge of trying to fight them. The F-15, the backbone of America's air power for more than a quarter century, may just be the most successful weapon in history. It is certainly the most successful fighter jet. In combat, its kill ratio over more than 30 years is 107 to zero. Zero. In three decades of flying, no F-15 has ever been shot down by an enemy plane—and that includes F-15s flown by air forces other than America's. Rival fighters rarely test those odds. Many of Saddam Hussein's MiGs fled into Iran when the U.S. attacked during the Gulf War. Of those who did fight the F-15, like the unfortunate pilot framed on Rodriguez's wall, every last one was shot down. The lesson was remembered. When the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, Saddam didn't just ground his air force, he *buried* it.

That complete dominance is eroding. Some foreign-built fighters can now match or best the F-15 in aerial combat, and given the changing nature of the threats our country is facing and the dizzying costs of maintaining our advantage,

America is choosing to give up some of the edge we've long enjoyed, rather than pay the price to preserve it. The next great fighter, the F-22 Raptor, is every bit as much a marvel today as the F-15 was 25 years ago, and if we produced the F-22 in sufficient numbers we could move the goalposts out of reach again. But we are building fewer than a third of the number needed to replace the older fighters in service. After losing hope of upgrading the whole F-15 fleet, the Air Force requested 381 F-22s, the minimum number that independent analysts said it needs to retain its current edge. Congress is buying 183, and has authorized the manufacture of parts for 20 more at the front end of the production line, enough to at least keep it working until President Obama decides whether or not to continue building F-22s. Like so many presidential dilemmas, it's a Scylla-and-Charybdis choice: a decision to save money and not build more would deliver a severe blow to a sprawling and vital U.S. industry at a time when the nation is mired in recession. And once the production line for the F-22 begins to shut down, restarting it will not be easy or cheap, even in reaction to a new threat. Each plane consists of about 1,000 parts, manufactured in 44 states, and because of the elaborate network of highly specialized subcontractors needed to fashion its unique airframe and avionics, assembling one F-22 can take as long as three years. Modern aerial wars are usually over in days, if not hours. Once those 183 to 203 new Raptors are built, they will have to do. Our end of the fight will still be borne primarily by the current fleet of aged F-15s.

When Obama unveiled his national-security team in December, he remarked

that he intended "to maintain the strongest military on the planet." That goal will continue to require the biggest bill in the world, but the portion that bought aerial dominance for so long may have become too dear. (The team's lone holdover from the Bush administration, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, has not been an advocate for the F-22.) If Obama opts to shut down production on the aircraft, it will certainly be a defensible decision. After all, our impressive arsenals did not stop one of the most damaging attacks in our history seven years ago, mounted by men armed with box cutters. There are various ways of computing the cost of a fighter, from "unit flyaway cost," which is the price tag as the plane rolls off the line, to "program acquisition unit cost," which adds in the cost of the research, development, and testing. The



The last image recorded by an Iraqi pilot in the Gulf War, showing an incoming missile from an American F-15

former for the F-22 is about \$178 million, and the latter about \$350 million. Either way, the F-22 is the most expensive fighter ever built.

But even reasonable decisions can have harsh consequences. Without a full complement of Raptors, America's aging fighters are more vulnerable, and hence more likely to be challenged. Complaints from the Air Force tend to be dismissed as the laments of spoiled fighter jocks denied the newest, hottest toy. But the picture on Rodriguez's wall reminds us of the stakes for the men and women in the cockpit. Countries such as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea will be more likely to take on the U.S. Air Force if their pilots stand a fighting chance. This could well mean more air battles, more old-style aces—and more downed American pilots.

The impact will not be felt only by aviators. Owning the sky is the first prerequisite of the way we fight wars today. Air supremacy is what enables us to send an elaborate fleet of machinery caterwauling over a targeted nation, such as Afghanistan or Iraq: the orchestrating AWACS ("Airborne Warning and Control System," the flying surveillance-and-command center); precision bombers; attack planes, helicopters, and drones; ground support; rescue choppers; and the great flying tankers that keep them all fueled. This aerial juggernaut enables modern ground-fighting tactics that rely on the rapid movement of relatively small units, because lightly armed, fast-moving forces can quickly summon devastating air support if they encounter a heavy threat. Wounded soldiers can count on speedy evacuation and sophisticated emergency medical care. Accomplishing all this with anything like the efficiency American forces have enjoyed since the Vietnam War depends on owning the sky, which means having air-to-air hunter-killers that can shoot down enemy planes and destroy surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites before the rest of the fleet takes to the sky. Superior fighters are the linchpin of our modern war tactics. Having owned the high ground for so long, we tend to forget that it is not a birthright.

Unless the 21st century is the first in human history to somehow transcend geopolitical strife, our military will face severe tests in the coming years. The United States will be expected to take the lead in any showdown against a sophisticated air force. So it is worth examining the nature of air-to-air combat today, and the possible consequences of not building a full fleet of F-22s.

At the center of this question is that most romantic of modern warriors, the ace.

GOING ACRO

The skills that make a fighter pilot great have, like aircraft, evolved. Japan's celebrated World War II ace, Saburo Sakai, who shot down more than 60 planes in aerial combat, described in his memoir, *Samurai!*, the extensive acrobatic training he and his fellow recruits received in pilot school to improve their strength and balance even before they flew. They worked on reducing their reaction time and perfecting their hand-eye coordination by swiping flies out of the air. Balance, coordination, reaction time, a feel for the airplane, gunnery, the ability to calmly perform complex acrobatic

maneuvers while under fire, a talent for thinking and acting quickly even while upside down or tumbling or out of control—these were all vitally important. But the paramount skill, Sakai recalled, was something the recruits had at the start: exceptional vision.

All of the young pilots had been selected for their perfect eyesight, but even more important was how broadly they could see, how wide a horizon they commanded, and how quickly they could focus in on the faintest off-center visual cue. They competed to locate stars in daylight. Sakai wrote:

Gradually, and with much more practice, we became quite adept at our star-hunting. Then we went further. When we had sighted and fixed the position of a particular star, we jerked our eyes away ninety degrees, and snapped back again to see if we could locate the star immediately. Of such things are fighter pilots made.

I personally cannot too highly commend this particular activity, inane as it may seem to those unfamiliar with the split-second, life-or-death movements of aerial warfare. I know that during my 200 air engagements with enemy planes, except for two minor errors I was never caught in a surprise attack.

Surprise attack—seeing the enemy before he sees you—is still the killing edge, which is why Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the fighter pilot and author, described dogfighting as less combat than "murder." Getting the jump on an enemy, hitting him before he sees you, is the best-case scenario, or the worst, depending on where you sit. As the air war over Japan turned increasingly one-sided, in 1945, Sakai's eyes kept him alive; only two other pilots in his unit survived.

Today, of course, electronic systems extend a fighter's vision well beyond the range of the most acute eyeball. Aerial combat is no longer a matter of fixing your sights on a dodging enemy. Most of the maneuvering in air-to-air

combat today takes place BVR, or beyond visual range. The modern fighter pilot flies strapped into the center of a moving electronic cocoon. His speeding jet emits a field of electrons that can find, identify, and target an enemy long before he will ever see it. At the same time, his electromagnetic aura defends him by thwarting the enemy's

radar. American pilots strive to find and shoot down enemy aircraft from outside what they call the WEZ, or "weapons engagement zone," which means safely beyond range of the enemy's missiles. Traveling faster than sound, the fighter pilot is part of a network that can spot an enemy over the horizon, sometimes before he even leaves the ground; that can attack multiple targets simultaneously; and that in an emergency can react to an incoming threat before the pilot is even aware of it. Today's jet is a machine so powerful, so smart, and so fast that the fighter jock's biggest challenge is to safely fly and land it.

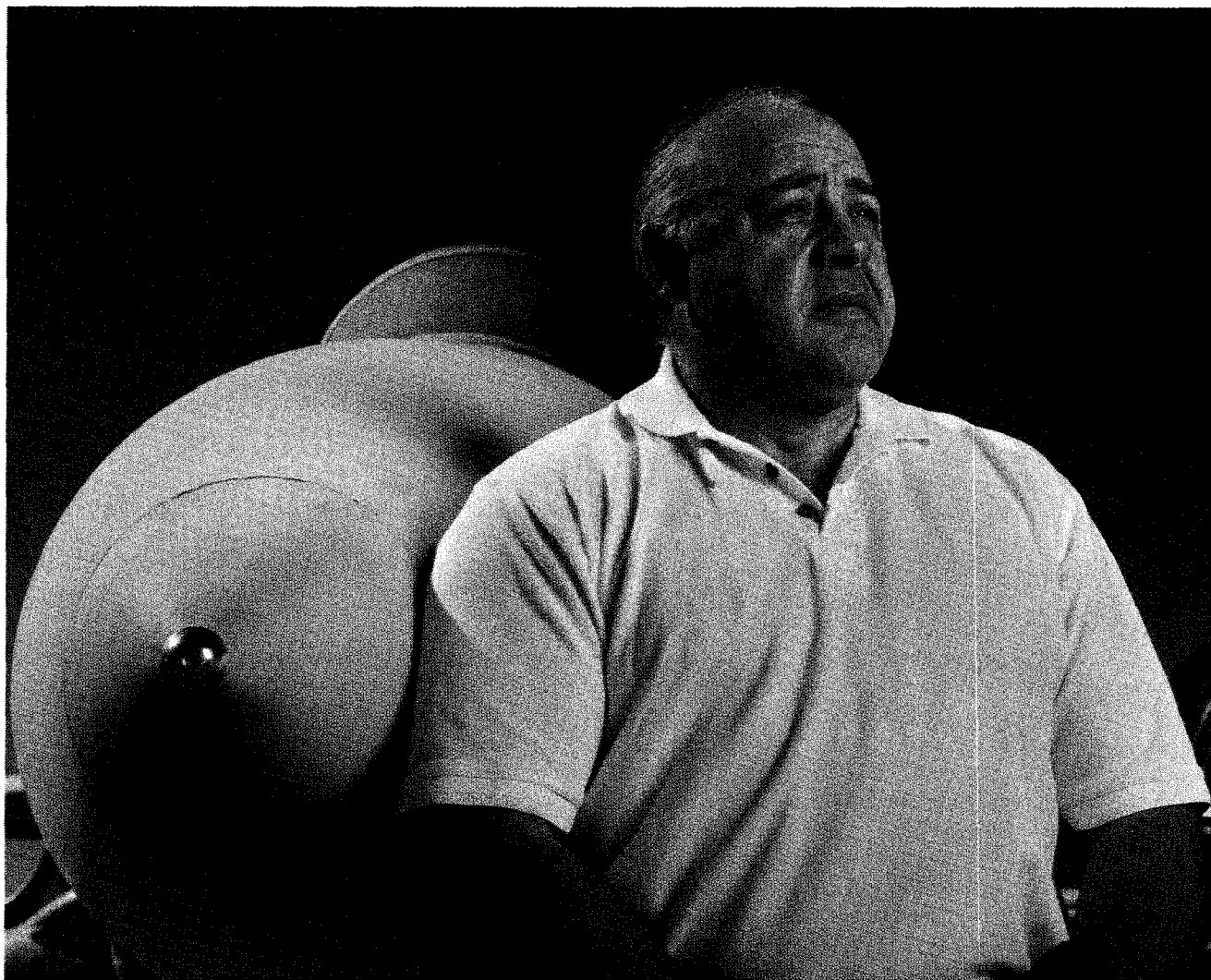
Combat in this arena has become virtual in every way except in its consequences. Tactics in a world of dueling electrons can be best understood in the abstract. Pilots speak of the need to extend their "timeline."

"When cavemen fought they had their fists, first of all," F-15 pilot Colonel Terrence "Skins" Fornof explained to me last year in Alaska. "Then someone came up with the sling, which

MORE ONLINE

For video footage of the F-22 Raptor in action, visit www.theatlantic.com/raptor.

THEATLANTIC.COM



Cesar Rodriguez, who retired with more air-to-air kills—three—than any active-duty Air Force pilot, stands beside an F-15.

meant he could attack his enemy before he could get close enough to take a swing. The history of warfare technology has all boiled down to increasing the distance between you and your enemy's fist. Distance means time, and you gain the advantage by extending that timeline. Our goal is the same as it ever was: to kill the enemy before he even has a chance to employ his weapon. War is not fair. You don't want him to even get close enough to fight."

The best flier in the world stands little chance against a superior aircraft, but that doesn't mean just anyone can be a good fighter pilot. The skills required today are related to those of the early aces, but different. Perhaps the best way to explain is to take a closer look at Rodriguez.

A lifelong military man, he is of average height with a bullish torso, a round face, brown eyes, and thinning gray hair. The house in Tucson where the picture hangs has been his home for two years—longer than any other place he has ever lived. He exudes brisk, straightforward confidence, without pretense or misgiving. Asked to name his single most important flying skill, the modern equivalent of Sakai's peripheral vision, Rodriguez struggles for an answer. It is something harder to grasp. It boils down to a talent for processing

multiple information streams simultaneously.

"A World War II pilot would look at all of the things going on in the cockpit today, and his first reaction would be, 'You guys have too many things going on here at once.' You know, it is sensory overload," he said when we talked at his home. "When you put one of those old pilots in a modern simulator, he can fly the airplane. The airplane is as easy to fly today as it was back then, maybe actually easier, because now it has aerodynamic features that make it more forgiving from the standpoint of taking off and landing. But they will very quickly say, 'I can't keep up with all the sensors that are buzzing into my brain right now.' And every sensor that talks to you has a different frequency, a different tone, a different format, and some of them you are only picking up audio, others it's a visual, some a combination of the two."

Rodriguez began pilot training in 1981, after graduating from the Citadel. He knew going in that, of the class of 70 pilot trainees, only about five would qualify to fly fighters. Most would graduate and play vital roles in the great air-war machine, but only the cream would win coveted fighter seats. The first wave of washouts came during simple maneuvers on the training jets. According to Rodriguez, "You start

STEVEN MECKLER

maneuvering and they'd get violently airsick. That was the biggest cut."

In the group that reached the next level, the academic workload sorted out the most-intense players from the wannabes. Rodriguez was used to the cloistered atmosphere and grinding academic pace of a military school, so he excelled in that area, too.

Those who excelled with him faced a new test: going acro.

"Suddenly acro was not just a cool thing you'd watch at the air show anymore," Rodriguez says. "You were acro. You were part of it and you had to be able to think on your back, on your head, at zero G and then at high Gs, depending on the maneuver." Avoiding G-LOC, or "gravity-induced loss of consciousness," during aggressive acrobatics is a physical struggle. As the force of gravity intensifies, blood drains rapidly from the brain unless the pilot fights back. The pressurized suit helps, tightening on the extremities and lower body, but the pilot learns to flex his legs, buttocks, and stomach muscles and to control his breath. He emerges from such maneuvers wrung out and drenched with sweat.

It is a literal gut check. Rodriguez was lucky. He had the constitution for it. The only time he ever got airsick was one morning when the flying conditions looked unpromising and, assuming that his flight would be scrapped, he "proceeded to power down on two big, huge breakfast burritos." Then he had to fly after all.

"I was told we were going to go up and actually do some advanced handling, which was a fairly physically challenging event because it was putting the airplane to the extreme aerodynamic limits ... falling down and getting into spins and stuff like that, so it was one of those things where I go, 'Okay, stand by one.' I reached down and grabbed my barf bag, filled it up, put it back in my G suit, and said, 'Okay, let's keep going.'"

Complex exercises required rapid mental calculations: if you entered a loop 10 knots slower than anticipated, that meant your airspeed would be too slow to complete the entire maneuver, so you would have to make an adjustment, quite literally, on the fly.

"These were the kind of things that you could do sitting on your chair in your room, but when you have an airplane strapped to your back and you're sweating and you're pulling Gs, then it's another matter," he said. "You had to do the math in your head." Needless to say, some people were better at this than others. Some pilots seemed to be able to do it intuitively, by the seat of their pants. Rodriguez was not one of them. But patient instructors and long hours in simulators, combined with a kind of desperation to succeed, eventually earned him a chance to fly the Air Force's hottest jets.

Only then did his real training begin, in Tucson and at Holloman Air Force Base, in New Mexico, and finally at the Air Force's "top gun" school, Nellis Air Force Base, in Nevada, where he flew training missions against a faux enemy, a dedicated force of experienced pilots trying hard to shoot him down. Technology is only part of what gives American

pilots their advantage. As hugely expensive as it is to design, produce, fly, and maintain vanguard fighters, it takes far more effort and money to hone pilots' skills, to keep squadrons of pilots like Rodriguez constantly flying, practicing, and getting better. Even if other nations had the know-how, few could afford to build a fleet of advanced modern fighters, and fewer still could afford to sustain an up-tempo environment for the men and women who fly and maintain it.

Being the best means learning to fully inhabit that screaming node, high above the slow curve of the Earth, strapped down in a bubble where the only real things are the sound of your own breathing and the feel of sweat rolling down

the center of your back. You are alone but not alone. You cope with constant, multiple streams of data, everything from basic flight information—airspeed, altitude, attitude, fuel levels—to incoming radar images displayed on small, glowing green screens stacked in rows before you and to both sides. In your helmet are three or four radio links, with the AWACS, with the ground, with your wingman, and with your flight leader. It is a little bit like trying to navigate at high speed with four or five different people talking to you at once, each with a slightly different set of directions. It is not for amateurs. By the time Rodriguez flew into combat for the first

time, he had hundreds of hours of training behind him, and being in the jet was second nature. With him were his wingman, his formation, and the superhuman reach of America's technological eyes and ears.

Hurling a few dozen jets into the sky against this, as Saddam did in 1991, was most unwise.

"FOX!"

Rodriguez and his wingman, Craig "Mole" Underhill, confronted their first Iraqi MiG-29s early on the third morning of the war that took back Kuwait from Saddam Hussein. They were leading a helicopter assault on Saddam's early-warning radar sites on the border with Saudi Arabia, clearing the way for devastating bombing runs on Iraqi airfields.

The air battle in this conflict was brief, decisive, and more intense than most Americans realized. By the time the Pentagon began showing off publicity videos of "smart bombs" pulverizing Iraqi targets, America and its allies owned the sky, but in getting there, 38 allied aircraft were destroyed. On this early sortie, Rodriguez and Underhill were flying out of Tabuk, an air base in northwestern Saudi Arabia, near the border with Jordan. As often happened in this fast-moving arena, they were initially tasked with one objective and then reassigned when they were airborne. They moved out at the head of a 36-aircraft strike force bearing down on a target 40 miles southwest of Baghdad. As they approached, several MiG-29s came up to challenge them.

The MiG-29, like the F-15, is considered a "fourth generation" fighter. (Since the first jet fighters started flying, there have been four great evolutionary advances, each representing a quantum leap in technology.) The Soviets began deploying the MiG-29 about nine years after the F-15s went

Within the world of military aviation there remains a hierarchy of cool, and fighter jocks still own the highest rung.

on line, and the plane itself is comparable to its American counterpart. But given all the other advantages enjoyed by the allied pilots, the brave, outnumbered Iraqi pilots launching themselves at the approaching juggernaut might as well have been committing suicide.

"From Western eyes, it's a suicide mission," Rodriguez told me. "From the eyes of the guy being invaded, he's protecting the homeland."

Even greatly disadvantaged, the Iraqi fighters were dangerous, and as it happened the large American force made a potentially fatal mistake that Saturday morning. The incoming MiGs were spotted, of course, but in the confusion of the moment either tactical errors were made by the strikers, or the Iraqi pilots exploited a seam in the American defenses. The AWACS command had spotted the MiGs immediately when they took off, and had handed them off to a Navy formation of F-14s, which failed to intercept them. When Rodriguez and Underhill were alerted to the approaching threat, it came as a jolting surprise. The MiGs were just 13 miles out and closing at a speed of more than 1,000 nautical mph. Both pilots immediately began evasive maneuvers.

Rodriguez dove steeply, getting below the lead MiG, where he would be harder to find on its radar—pointing down, the radar's signal can get confused by all the electrons bouncing back up from the ground. Then Rodriguez began flying in a low arc, keeping the MiG on his wing line, making himself "skinny," presenting as small a radar target as possible. Within minutes the two fighters would be in a visual turning fight, a situation familiar to many experienced pilots from earlier wars, but one that is not supposed to happen in modern air warfare. The biggest difference between this fight and the old ones was speed. It would unfold not in minutes but in seconds. Rodriguez's posture was strictly defensive: he could not target and shoot at the Iraqi plane, but it could shoot at him.

A cockpit alarm warned him when the MiG's radar locked on him. The threat was still just a blip on his screen; he hadn't actually seen it yet. He was frightened and thinking furiously when in his headset he heard Underhill shout, "Fox!"—the code word for *I have just fired a missile*.

Rodriguez looked back over his shoulder, following the smoke trail of Underhill's missile, and then, looking out ahead of it, caught his first and only glimpse of the MiG. This is the precise instant captured from the Iraqi pilot's perspective in the photo on Rodriguez's wall. It turns out that the picture does not preserve a moment of personal triumph for him, as I had originally supposed, but one of intense fear and vulnerability. Rodriguez's little F-15 in the distance was not predator but prey, trapped and awaiting a kill shot that would never come, because in the next instant the MiG became a huge fireball in the sky. The whole encounter lasted a little more than 10 seconds.

"Mole saves my bacon because he kills this guy before he can take a shot at me," Rodriguez said as we sat in his office.

There was no time to celebrate, because the destroyed

MiG's wingman was now closing in on them, just seven miles out. Underhill and Rodriguez split their planes wide apart and assumed different altitudes. That way, the incoming MiG might spot one of them, but probably not both, and they improved their chances of eyeballing it. Before shooting at it, they had to make sure it was Iraqi—many planes were in the air that morning—but they wouldn't have time to run the normal electronic matrix used to distinguish friend from foe.

They both saw the MiG at the same time. It had an Iraqi flag painted on it. Rodriguez passed the enemy fighter about 300 feet off its wing.

"He notices that I am there," Rodriguez said. "He also notices that Mole's about 20,000 feet above us. But at no point do I think he correlates the two of us as a formation."

If the MiG pilot went for Underhill, then Rodriguez could shoot him down; if he came for Rodriguez, "then Mole eats him up." Confused, the angling MiG started up, and then down, which gave Rodriguez time to fly inside his turning circle, putting himself into roughly the same attack position the earlier MiG had had on him.

The Iraqi pilot, no doubt hearing an alarm telling him that an F-15 had locked him in its radar, attempted a classic split-S maneuver, which is the quickest way to reverse direction in the air. Flying parallel to the ground, he flipped his aircraft upside down and then attempted to fly a half circle, diving down, pulling up, and leveling off to head in the opposite direction. It was the right escape maneuver for an altitude of at least 5,000 feet, but the pilot, in his alarm and haste, neglected to compute one vital bit of data: he was only 600 feet up. He flew his jet straight

into the desert floor.

"He had lost his situational awareness," Rodriguez explained. "He was trying to perform a maneuver that he can do comfortably at 5,000 or 10,000 feet, and doesn't realize that the fight, which started at 8,000 feet, had degraded and degraded closer to the desert floor. It's a lack of training, a lack of experience, but given the situation he was in against two F-15s, my argument is that no one would have done much better. He's already seen his flight lead explode. He might not have hit the desert floor, but he was going to die anyway."

THESE AIR KILLS were among the first by American pilots since Vietnam. An entire generation of fighters had come and gone without encountering an enemy in the sky. Three dozen Iraqi jets were shot down in the war, and Rodriguez was one of six pilots in his squadron who got two.

The second of his aerial kills was what he called "more routine," more typical of modern aerial combat. A week after the first episode, he was flying in what the Air Force calls a "wall of Eagles," a formation of four F-15s spread out in the sky over roughly five to eight miles at 33,000 feet to maximize their visibility and radar range. Beneath them was thick undercast, a carpet of clouds opaque to their eyes

In the next instant, the MiG became a huge fireball in the sky. "Mole saves my bacon because he kills this guy before he can take a shot at me."

but transparent to electronic surveillance systems. At that point, the remaining Iraqi air force was so vulnerable that the AWACS plane assisting the F-15s picked up the enemy jets the minute they started their engines, while they were still on the ground. Rodriguez and the other pilots watched three radar blips form on their screens as the MiGs took off and climbed. Rodriguez assumed that the planes were, like the rest of Saddam's air force, escaping into Iran.

"They were basically running scared," he says. "Extremely scared."

It took a few moments to identify the jets as MiG-23s, and then the wall of Eagles began preparing to launch missiles at them.

"We think we're going to have to stay above the clouds and we're never going to see the missiles do their job, and all of a sudden there's a big sucker hole, an opening in the clouds below," he says. "The F-15s dove to about 13,000 feet. The fleeing MiGs were hugging the terrain, flying just 300 to 400 feet above the ground, when we started launching AIM-7 missiles at them.

"And, sure enough, the missiles did their job."

The Iraqi flight leader took the first hit. An American missile sliced through his plane, taking out the engine but leaving the shell of the plane intact. Trailing a thick cloud of smoke, the pilot began turning to the north, apparently trying to return to his base. Rodriguez's flight leader fired a Sidewinder, a heat-seeking missile that lit up the sky when it hit, turning the unfortunate Iraqi pilot and his plane into an enormous fireball.

Rodriguez's missile ripped straight through his target. The MiG apparently flew right into it. There was no large explosion. The missile just tore the jet to pieces, turning it into what Rodriguez called "a ground-level sparkler," scattering debris across a wide swath of desert.

RODRIGUEZ'S THIRD AND last kill came eight years later, on March 24, 1999, when he flew his F-15 as part of the NATO force attacking Serbian positions during the Kosovo campaign. Rodriguez's squadron was assigned to lead an attack on a Serbian SAM site in Montenegro. On the way they would pass over an airfield in Pristina, Kosovo, where the Serbs had carved hangars for their fighters inside a mountain. No one was sure what kinds of planes, if any, were hidden there.

He took off from Cervia, Italy, on a clear night. As he ascended, Rodriguez could see the Italian coast to the west, lit up like a throbbing discotheque. He was pointed east, toward what was then still called Yugoslavia.

"It was pitch black," he recalls. "You know, here's a region of the world that has been at war, and where every light at night is a potential target. So everything below was just pitch black. You go, 'Man, it's two different worlds here.'"

The plan was for the multinational formation to fly lights-out, but the different levels of training and experience began to tell. American pilots fly black all the time, so when the order came to turn off lights, it was just another night's work. But for some of the Dutch, German, British, Italian, Spanish, and Turkish pilots, this wasn't so easy.

"The first time we tried it, as I looked behind me, I could see a train of fighters spread out over 100 miles behind me, and when the 'lights out' order came, they all went black," said Rodriguez. "Then, sure enough, the comfort factor for some of these guys started to go. They started getting a little antsy and then, all of a sudden, *pooh, pooh, pooh*, the lights started coming back on. And we go, 'Okay, guys, we really need to do this completely lights-out. If we don't do this, we're not going to be ready.' But we got everybody into the train."

A measure of confusion persisted, however. When the target was reached, the squadron commenced an air assault that would have taken an all-American unit five to eight minutes. This one took nearly an hour. Feeling increasingly vulnerable to attack by ground or air threats, Rodriguez circled and waited, trying to make his flight pattern unpredictable. As Rodriguez and his wingman, Bill Denham, turned back toward Italy, they picked up an aircraft coming up from the airfield in Pristina. At first it bore north, away from them, but then it turned.

The American planes began to conduct the standard series of checks to identify the plane. The F-15 is equipped with a full range of instruments to, in effect, interrogate an unidentified plane in the air. They were coordinating with an AWACS, working through some language difficulties (the controllers spoke accented English). A process that would normally take 20 seconds took three times as long, which is a huge difference when you're traveling hundreds of miles per hour. Rodriguez and his wingman were rapidly approaching the weapons engagement zone, where they would lose the advantage of their longer-range missiles.

They were on the edge of the WEZ as the ID was completed, and Rodriguez launched an AMRAAM, or "advanced medium-range air-to-air missile," a new element of his arsenal added after the Gulf War. In the Air Force, they call it the Slammer. One advantage it affords is a "fire and forget" feature; because the missile has its own homing and guidance system, the pilot need not stay pointed at the target. He is free to turn and evade the incoming jet in case his shot for some reason misses. Rodriguez stayed with his missile for as long as he could.

"It all went into slow motion, and I felt like the missile and I were kind of flying in formation for a while," he recalls. "It just seemed to stay there for a couple of seconds and then, *whoosh!* It disappears. You see that glow [the missile's exhaust], and that becomes just a little ember, and then it's gone. And of course at night you can't follow it anymore. The smoke trail goes away. But I could see it start to curve, and I go, 'Okay, it looks like it's doing the right lead-pursuit tracking.' And the missile did everything it was advertised to do. We have a little counter display inside the cockpit that ticks down the time to intercept, and when the counter said zero, I looked outside through my canopy to the general vicinity of where I knew the target was going to be. I mean, that fireball was huge."

Rodriguez said it was as though three or four giant sports stadiums had turned on all their lights at the same time.

"The reason it was so magnificent," he said, "was because everything was covered in snow. So the fireball reflected off the snow, causing an even bigger illumination of the sky and everything around it."

It was the first air kill of the Kosovo campaign, and the last of Rodriguez's career. He gave little thought to the person he had just incinerated.

"I'm sure he had been a Yugoslav air-force pilot, which was a good air force for what they have," he said. "I don't personalize the war. He was doing what I was doing for my country."

"EYE-WATERING"

Manufactured by McDonnell Douglas starting in the early 1970s, the twin-engine, supersonic F-15 was the first aircraft built with the understanding that a plane's avionics, or electronic guts, were as important as its aeronautics, its flying capabilities. It was designed and built around an enormous radar disk.

"When it came on line 30 years ago, it had the best radar, the best weapons-employment displays ever, and the best maneuverability of any aircraft out there," Brigadier General Thomas "Pugs" Tinsley told me when I visited him in Alaska last spring, a few weeks before his death. At the time, Tinsley commanded the Air Force's Third Wing out of Elmendorf Air Force Base, in Anchorage. "The F-15's thrust-to-weight ratio was way ahead of anything else, and its flight-control system was much smarter and more stable. It could go out there and just fly circles around the F-4 [the Phantom, its immediate predecessor] and have its way with MiG-23s [the Soviets' best fighter], just eat them up."

For more than a quarter century, the speed and sound of a formation of F-15s or F-16s has made a commanding statement about American power, as anyone who has ever stood under one can attest. You feel its approach before you can hear or see it, a low vibration that starts in your toes and rises until the gray jets flick past overhead. Only then comes the roar. They are gone before your eyes focus on them, leaving behind the orange glow of their afterburners and a wash of energy that hammers your ears and rattles your spine. As a patriotic display it is impressive, something to stir pride and admiration—but imagine being on the receiving end of such power, to have it shooting at you. It is one of the most convincing arguments ever made for surrender.

Despite the romantic leather-helmet, silk-scarf legend of the fighter pilot, aerial combat has always been more about engineering than flying. Considering that the first tentative Wright Brothers flight at Kitty Hawk took place just over a century ago, the evolution of aerial combat has been astonishing. Inside of 40 years, from World War I to the Korean conflict, pilots went from shooting at each other with pistols from propeller-driven biplanes to dueling with cannons and missiles in jet aircraft moving faster than sound. At the start of World War II, American fighter and bomber pilots were adapting their tactics to cope with superior German and Japanese fighters, and by the end they had aircraft that could fly so high, so fast, and for so long, that few enemy fighters could even get close enough to shoot at them. Sakai noted, sadly, that the B-29 Superfortress was simply "insuperable."

By Korea, "air breathers," or jets, had replaced the finely crafted propeller-driven fighters of lore, and aerial duels between American F-86 Sabres and Soviet-built MiG-15s were fleeting visual encounters where the biggest challenge was to get close enough to fire.

Today the fight has moved beyond visual range, into the realm of electrons, and involves what fighter pilots call "look-down, shoot-down" capability. The air war is a contest between radar systems, countermeasures, and missiles. American pilots have long enjoyed the advantages of seeing an enemy first, and of having missiles with the range and speed to hit the enemy from beyond the WEZ. But those advantages have gradually eroded. A fighter jet's theoretical "kill ratio" is based on projections of how many enemy fighters it could shoot down before getting shot down itself when faced with an unlimited number of attackers at once. The F-15's kill ratio of 8-to-1, which is what it enjoyed throughout most of its history and which reflected more than anything the finite capability to carry munitions, is now closer to 3-to-1.

"If the enemy has radar-guided missiles, now we're shooting at each other," Lieutenant Colonel Chuck "Corky" Corcoran told me last year at Elmendorf. Corcoran is a former F-15 pilot who now commands the 525th Fighter Squadron, the Bulldogs, one of the three F-22 squadrons just now getting planes. "If those enemy weapons have similar capabilities to ours, I've got to employ some sort of tactic to gain an advantage, whether it's getting higher and faster so I can shoot first, or checking away [shifting slightly off course] to increase his missile's time of flight."

Drawing out that time, even by a split second, can mean everything, because it allows your missile to strike first. Once the enemy's plane is destroyed, its radar can no longer steer his missile.

"His missile is looking for reflected radar energy that he's pointing at you, so if your missile gets to him and blows him up and kills his radar before his missile gets to you, then you are going to live," Corcoran explained.

An AMRAAM missile like the one Rodriguez used over Kosovo was a major step forward because it frees the attacking plane from having to keep its radar pointed at the target. The American plane can launch a missile from outside the WEZ, turn, and kick on its afterburners before the target has a chance to even shoot.

These tools rely, of course, on radar, which can be jammed.

"If you can't match your enemy's technology, you can always subtract from it," says Wayne Waller, a Virginia contractor who designs radar systems for the F-15. "You may invent something that gives you an advantage, but you can't hang on to it for very long. Our radar used to be difficult to jam, but the capability to do that has improved geometrically. That knowledge is out there. And the jamming advances cost a lot less than improving the radar."

Countries that cannot afford to build fleets of the most advanced supersonic fighters can afford to build pods with

It may well be that the price of aerial dominance has become too dear. But other countries will be more likely to take on the U.S. Air Force if their pilots stand a fighting chance.

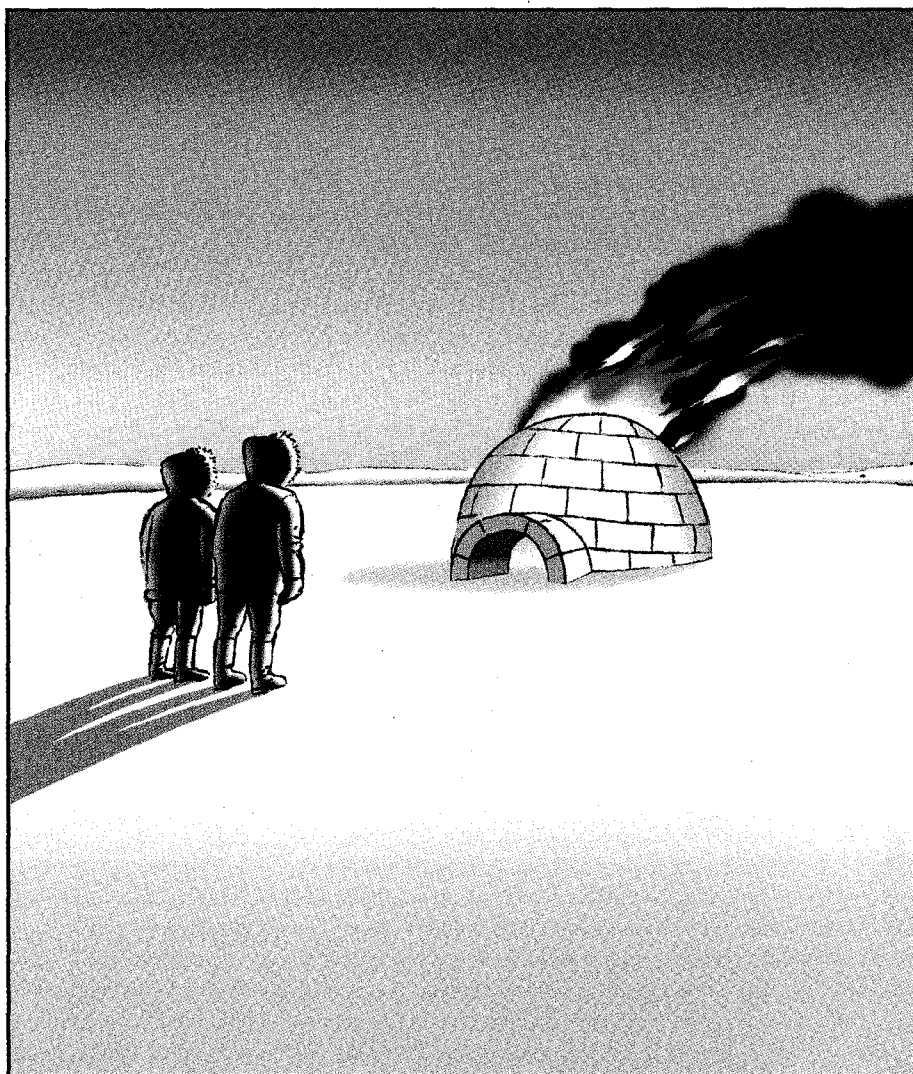
clever software to mount on older airframes. This was brought home dramatically in Cope India 2004, a large aerial-combat training exercise that pitted F-15 pilots from Elmendorf against India's air force, which is made up of the MiG-21 and MiG-29, and the newer Mirage 2000 and Russian-built Su-30. The exercises were conducted high over north-central India, near the city of Gwalior.

"We came rolling in, like, 'Beep-beep, superpower coming through,'" Colonel Fornof told me. "And we had our eyes opened. We learned a lot. By the third week, we were facing a threat that we weren't prepared to face, because we had underestimated them. They had figured out how to take Russian-built equipment and improve upon it."

A small country can buy a MiG-21 on the world weapons market for about \$100,000, put in a better engine, add more-sophisticated radar and jamming systems, improve the cockpit design, and outfit it with "launch and leave" missiles comparable to the AMRAAM. These hybrid threats are more dangerous than any rival fighters America has seen in generations, and they cost much less than building a competitive fourth-generation fighter from scratch. The lower expense enables rival air forces to put more of them in the air, and because the F-15 can carry only so many munitions, American pilots found themselves overwhelmed by both technology and sheer numbers during the exercises over India.

Today the average age of the F-15s in use is 24 years, which in the world of modern electronics means they were born several geological ages ago. When the F-15 started flying missions, Jimmy Carter was president and the Cold War was shaping geopolitics. Most Americans didn't own a home computer. People were still buying music on vinyl albums and cassette tapes. The first F-15s had roughly the computer capability of the video game Pong. If anything, the pace of innovation is even faster in the military than in the civilian world, and as better look-down, shoot-down capabilities have come on line, they have been systematically layered and squeezed into the aging airframe of the F-15. This has led to the dizzying complexity of the fighter's cockpit. But no matter how many gizmos the wizards can squeeze into the F-15, it remains an old fighter.

GALLERY LOCAL WARMING by Guy Billout



"If you take a Pinto and put really nice tires on it, it's still a Pinto," Colonel Corcoran says. His choice of the unlovely, pedestrian Ford sedan as a metaphor is telling: pilots like Corcoran see the F-22 as a Formula One racer by comparison. "You can put a bigger engine in the Pinto, but the frame is not built to handle the higher speeds," he said. "To build a fifth-generation fighter, you have to start from the ground up."

Some of the pilots I spoke to described the F-22 as such a huge leap in capability that it ought to be considered not a fifth-generation fighter, one step up from the F-15, but sixth-generation.

"It is really two big steps ahead of anything else out there," Corcoran told me. "All of the data from all the different sensors in the aircraft are fused. The F-22 has one big display in the middle of the cockpit, so you are kind of sitting in the middle of that display, and all of the sensors run on their own. And tracks show up all around you, 360 degrees, and all of it in color. So the red guys are bad, the green guys are good, and the yellow guys—we don't know who the yellow guys

are yet. So without the pilot doing anything, you have this 360-degree picture of the battle space around you. With the F-15, after a couple of years of training, you might be able to achieve that level of awareness."

Major Derek Routt and Lieutenant Colonel Murray Nance have a unique perspective on the new fighter. They both fly for the Air Force's 65th Aggressor Squadron, mimicking the tactics and capabilities of enemy air forces in war games. I met them last summer at Elmendorf, where they were in the middle of Red Flag exercises—realistic war games carried out every few years—featuring "battling" F-15s and F-22s.

"I saw a Raptor just yesterday," Routt said. "It was way above me. I was just being called dead at the time. You usually don't see it until it's done with you, flying overhead, rocking its wings, saying, 'Thanks for playing, fellows.'"

"I flew in a comparison test with both the F-15 and the F-22," he continued. "You flew against the F-22 one day, and the next day we took the same profile and flew against the F-15. I fought both of those, and there was absolutely no comparison. This is not a paid advertisement for the F-22. You talk to any aviator in the world, ask what they would like to fly, and if they don't say the F-22, then they are lying. I would kill to fly it."

"It is hard to kill what you can't see," Nance said. "It's eye-watering, the kind of turning it can do."

"Eye-watering?" I asked.

"Makes you cry. I mean, you realize, 'How did he just do that?'"

LAST SUMMER AT Elmendorf, Corcoran sat me down in the cockpits of both an F-15 and an F-22 to show me just how different they are. As the F-22 is to a modern point-and-click laptop—user-friendly—the F-15 is to the first clunky personal computers, the ones where you had to type instructions in basic computer language to perform the simplest of tasks. All of the avionics on the F-22 were designed from the ground up, and are fully integrated. The big central screen makes situational awareness intuitive. Better still, it is linked with all the other Raptors in its formation, and with the AWACS command. There is now only one page, and everyone is on it.

"It's all there in front of you," General Tinsley explained. "Where am I? Where are you? Who is out there? Who is locking on to me? It gives you a God's-eye view that is simply a thing of beauty. I have sensors in the F-22 that don't just look out the front of the airplane, they are spread all over the aircraft. I can see somebody anywhere. It is easier on the pilot, which makes him a more efficient killing machine."

The improvement is so great that some of the older F-15 pilots tend to look down their noses at the youngsters flying the F-22.

"To be good in the F-15, you have to work at it," Corcoran told me. "It's easier to separate the men from the boys and identify the real talent. But the way I see it, the less time my F-22 pilots have to spend sorting out all this data, the more time they have to think tactically and react to what is happening around them. That means our entire force, from top to bottom, is more effective."

The F-22's most remarkable quality is that it is "combat-coated," which means it is painted with material that absorbs

rather than deflects the electrons beamed out by the enemy's defense systems, making it virtually invisible to radar. Talking about it, Tinsley grew gruffly animated.

"Now I have stealth!" he said. "The F-15 is a big airplane; you can see that thing outside of 10 nautical miles. The F-16 is a little bit better in a dogfight, visually, because it's a smaller aircraft. I might not be able to see it turning until about seven or eight nautical miles. The F-22, the bad guys can't even see me on their radar, and even in visual range the Raptor is small. My missiles hit them before they even know I am there. And I'm not just talking about air-to-air, I'm talking about air-to-ground."

The biggest threat to American fighters during the first wave of an assault is from surface-to-air missiles. They are much cheaper to build and maintain than a fleet of supersonic fighters, so smaller countries such as Iran have invested heavily in them. Attacking SAM sites in an F-15 is risky work. But with the F-22, pilots are back to shooting fish in a barrel.

"The F-22 avionics allow me to be a better battle-space manager and efficient killer," Tinsley explained. "I have stealth, so I have the surprise piece. And then on top of all that, I can do it at supercruise. I can climb higher than other fighters, I can go faster with lower fuel consumption, so I can cover a larger space. And no one can see me. Now we're getting that 8-to-1 kill ratio I need to maintain superiority."

THE RETURN OF THE FAIR FIGHT

The Air Force fears that the dominance of U.S. airpower has been so complete for so long that it is taken for granted. The ability of the United States to own the skies over any battlefield has transformed the way we fight. The last American soldier killed on the ground by an enemy air attack died in Korea, on April 15, 1953.

Russia, China, Iran, India, North Korea, Pakistan, and others are now flying fourth-generation fighters with avionics that match or exceed the F-15's. Ideally, from the standpoint of the U.S. Air Force, the F-22 would gradually replace most of the F-15s in the U.S. fleet over the next 15 years, and two or three more generations of American pilots, soldiers, and marines would fight without worrying about attacks from the sky. But that isn't going to happen.

"It means a step down from air dominance," Richard Aboulafia, an air-warfare analyst for the Teal Group, which conducts assessments for the defense industry, told me. "The decision not to replace the F-15 fleet with the F-22 ultimately means that we will accept air casualties. We will lose more pilots. We will still achieve air superiority, but we will get hurt achieving it."

General Tinsley suggested that there will be a deeper consequence: other countries will be more tempted to challenge us in the air. The dominance of the F-15 had already begun to erode before the Soviet Union collapsed, in 1991. The last fighter the Soviets produced, the MiG-29, had similar aeronautic capabilities, and its radar and weapons systems gave it look-down, shoot-down tools on a par with the F-15's. Today, Russia is equipping its air force with Su-35s, and has offered them for sale. Hugo Chávez's Venezuela is a customer of the plane's close cousin, the Su-30. These fighters are every bit the match of the F-15. Combine that

with the hybrid threat posed by revamped older fighters, and the fight in the air begins to look fair for the first time in a half century.

It was fashionable in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union to argue that the threat of conventional warfare was no longer relevant, because no other nation could compete with the United States on conventional terms. The attacks of September 11, 2001, underlined that argument; the new threat was “asymmetrical”—small cells of sophisticated terrorists against whom our huge arsenals were useless.

Conventional weaponry may be useless against terrorists, but that doesn’t mean the old threats have disappeared. Russia’s incursion into Georgia and threatening gestures against the Baltic states; Iran’s persistence in pursuing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles; North Korea’s decision to ignore its agreement to cease building nuclear weapons—all are reminders that the threat posed by belligerent nation-states is still real. If Georgia is admitted to NATO, the United States and other member nations will be obliged by treaty to defend it from Russia. China continues to rapidly expand its air force. Conflict with these nations isn’t inevitable or even necessarily probable, but as we become more vulnerable in the air, it may well become more likely.

“What happens when we no longer own that advantage in the air?” Tinsley asked me. “Are our enemies going to feel a little froggy and push the limits? Why haven’t we fought that many wars? If America hadn’t built the F-15, would it have been the same story? How much did our fleet of F-15s keep other countries at bay? If we had been stuck with the F-4 and someone had come along with a MiG-29, would they have stepped out and done some damage? We have to replace *all* the F-15s with F-22s.”

This is the position you would expect from an Air Force general, whose job was to make sure America continues its unquestioned ownership of the sky. One might just as easily argue that lack of such complete superiority will act as a healthy restraint on American military aggression. After all, the latest big war, in Iraq, was one we started. If we are more likely to bleed, perhaps we will be slower to fight.

But fights will come. The squadron Colonel Corcoran is pulling together at Elmendorf will consist of an elite few. The 525th Bulldogs have a tradition reaching back to World War II, when its pilots flew P-51 Mustangs and P-47 Thunderbolts over Europe. Such squadrons are small, close-knit clubs and, especially when based in such remote outposts as Elmendorf, define their pilots’ personal, social, and professional lives. Their members sit at the pinnacle of their profession, every bit as much an elite (perhaps more so) as professional athletes, only without the pay or celebrity. Photos of the Bulldog squadron’s decorated exploits and heroes line the walls of its bar—or, as one happy pilot told me with a shot glass in one hand and a beer in the other, “Not a bar, a ‘Heritage Room!’”—where pilots gather for ritualized bouts of drinking, roasting, and storytelling. There are already two operational

**Superior
fighter jets
are the linchpin
of our modern
war tactics.
Having owned
the high ground
for so long,
we forget
it is not our
birthright.**

F-22 squadrons at Langley Air Force Base, in Virginia, and eventually Corcoran’s will be one of two in Alaska. If and when a conflict arises, they will be stretched wide and far.

The good news is that the Air Force has had some success integrating the newer fighter with its older ones. Part of its argument for the F-22s was that they were too sophisticated to be teamed with older, lesser planes. But early results in Red Flag competitions suggest otherwise.

“When the F-15s are up doing their tactics, we’re kind of back behind them a little bit and helping them out if they have trouble,” Colonel Jim Hecker, the operations-group commander at Elmendorf, told me. “If an F-15 is having some trouble dealing with electronic countermeasures where he can’t shoot, that’s when we’ll go in and get rid of that guy for him. I think the synergistic effect of having a couple of F-22s in with those fourth-generation fighters is great. Based on the buy, I think we’re going to have to do that if we stay at the same number of F-22s. We simply don’t have enough, so we have to find ways to integrate like this to optimize our capability.”

So America’s fighter fleet is likely to remain F-15-based, backed up by the F-22 and F-35, a fifth-generation fighter that resembles the Raptor but without the same maneuverability and speed. It means that the days when the Air Force’s leading “ace” has only three kills may be coming to an end. If more vulnerability means more challenges—and it usually does—then more fighters will be seeing action. If the cost of air supremacy is not paid in dollars, it may be paid in blood.

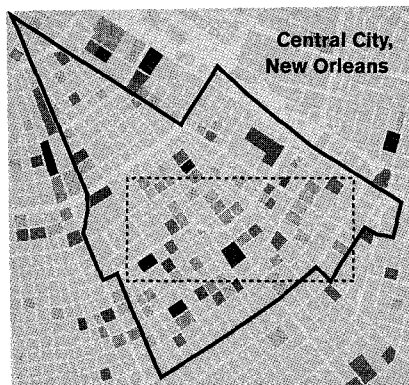
AFTER 26 YEARS of flying, Rodriguez is no longer in the fight. Pushing 50, he now works for Raytheon. One of his responsibilities is to sell the AMRAAM, an assignment that puts to good use the story of his killer sortie over Pristina, when he lit up the snowy night with that MiG. He hasn’t flown an airplane since 2004. After all those years of going acro in the F-15, it’s hard for him to get a thrill in the cockpit of anything else.

“I’ve relinquished myself to business class,” he said.

He’s passed the baton. But no matter how different the demands on a fighter pilot have become, Rodriguez is convinced that the job itself hasn’t changed that much.

“It’s the same person,” he said. “He’s just introduced to technology. I mean, when you think about it, today kids are growing up exposed to multitasking, multisensory inputs when they play a video game. So that person is going to evolve into someone technically friendly with everything new that comes up. Back in World War I, World War II, the concept of flying itself was a leap, you know, a leap of faith in some cases. And that’s the same one that we want flying fighters today, the one willing to take the leap.” ■

Mark Bowden is an Atlantic national correspondent. His most recent book is The Best Game Ever, about the 1958 NFL championship game.



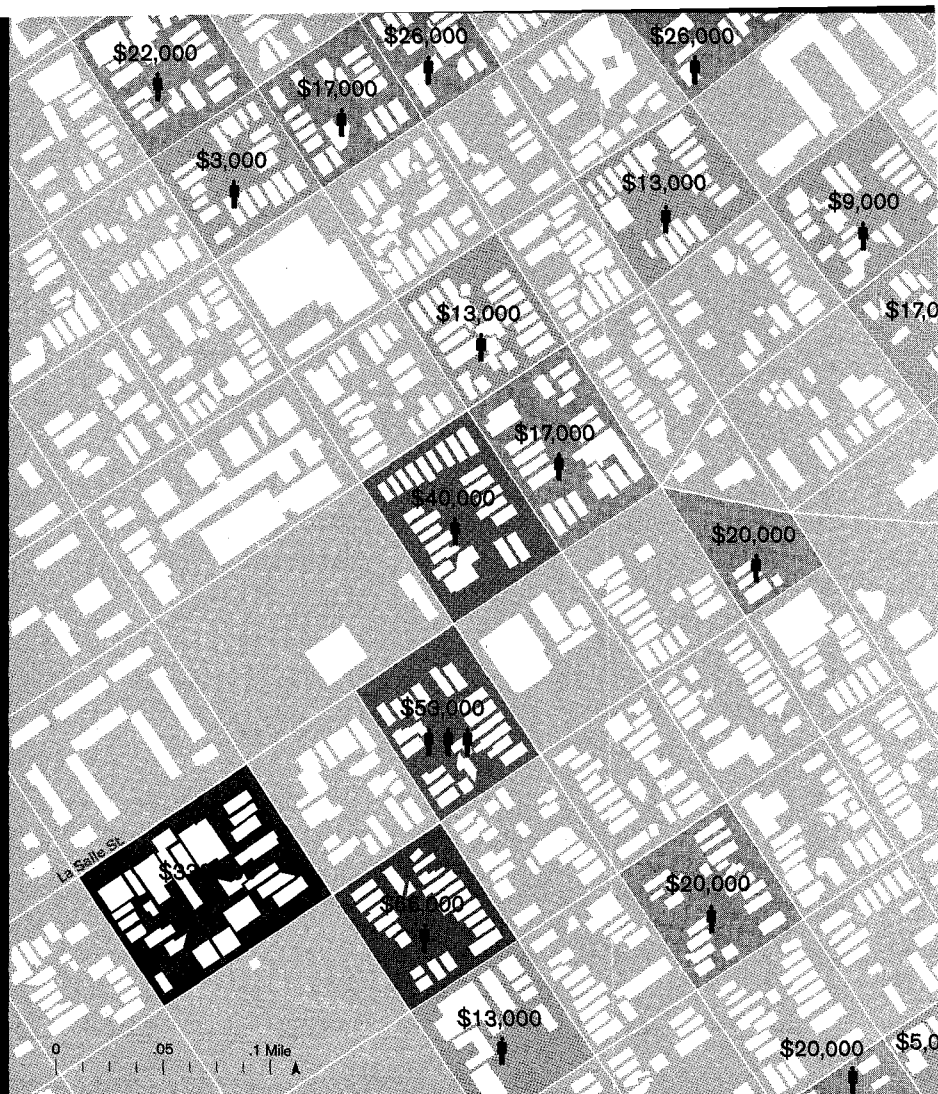
Prison Blocks

THE TOLL OF INCARCERATION
IN ONE NEW ORLEANS
NEIGHBORHOOD

by Laura Kurgan

HURRICANE KATRINA DISPLACED hundreds of thousands of New Orleans residents; as they've returned, their struggles to remake their lives and communities have been well chronicled. But smaller waves of displacement, followed by straggling return, have been washing through the city, largely unremarked, for many years. In 2003, upwards of 12,000 New Orleans-area residents left the city for prison; more than half were expected to return home within three years. This destructive cycle, interrupted by the storm, is slowly reasserting itself.

Nationwide, an estimated two-thirds of the people who leave prison are arrested within three years. A disproportionate number of them come from a few urban neighborhoods in big cities. Many states spend more than \$1 million a year to incarcerate the residents of single blocks or small neighborhoods. One such "million-dollar neighborhood" is shown above—a half-square-mile portion of Central City, an impoverished district southwest of the French



The perpetual migration between prison and a few predictable neighborhoods is not only costly—it also destabilizes community life. Some New Orleans officials and community groups are now using prison-admission maps like these to explore new investments—block by block—in the social infrastructure of these damaged neighborhoods. Plenty of money is already being spent on these neighborhoods, in the form of policing and prison costs; the hope is that by spending more money *in* them, in a highly targeted fashion, the release-and-

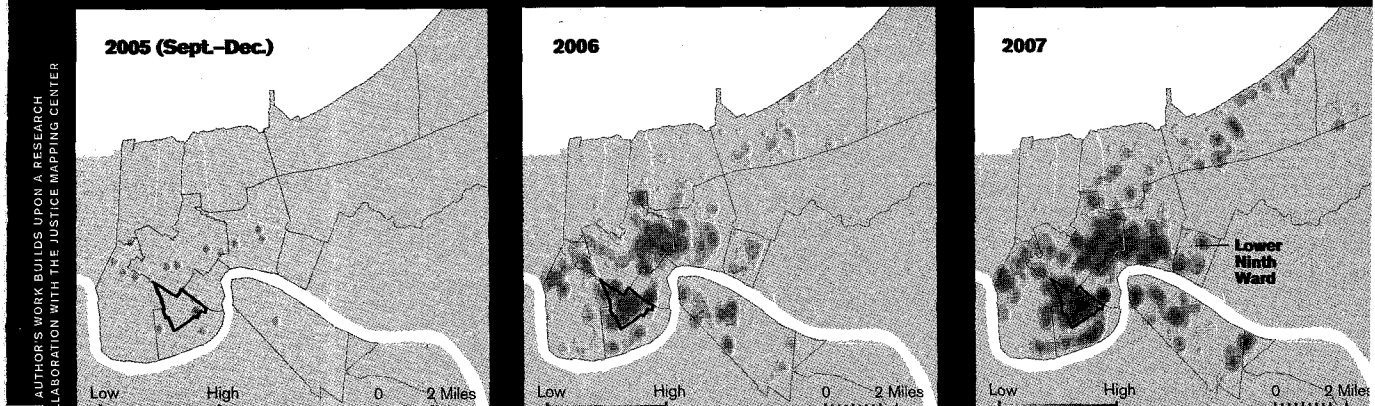
▼ The Same Old Problem

The maps below show the citywide density of prison admissions in recent years. As of 2007, incarceration rates had not returned to their





pre-storm levels, but they had been rising. Incarceration patterns had also shifted, reflecting the uneven return of the population. In the badly damaged Lower Ninth Ward, for example, prison admissions were down by 75 percent, though that's hardly cause for celebration: the district's population had fallen by 85 percent since 2000.



marriage and family while seeking to adapt its teachings to the expectations of the modern world. Presiding over the debate, gently—too gently?—prodding the community clergy, is Rowan Williams, the brilliant and beleaguered archbishop of Canterbury. He is criticized from all sides for his handling of these issues, but his distinctive approach may offer the only way to open the Anglican Church to gay people.

PROFILE

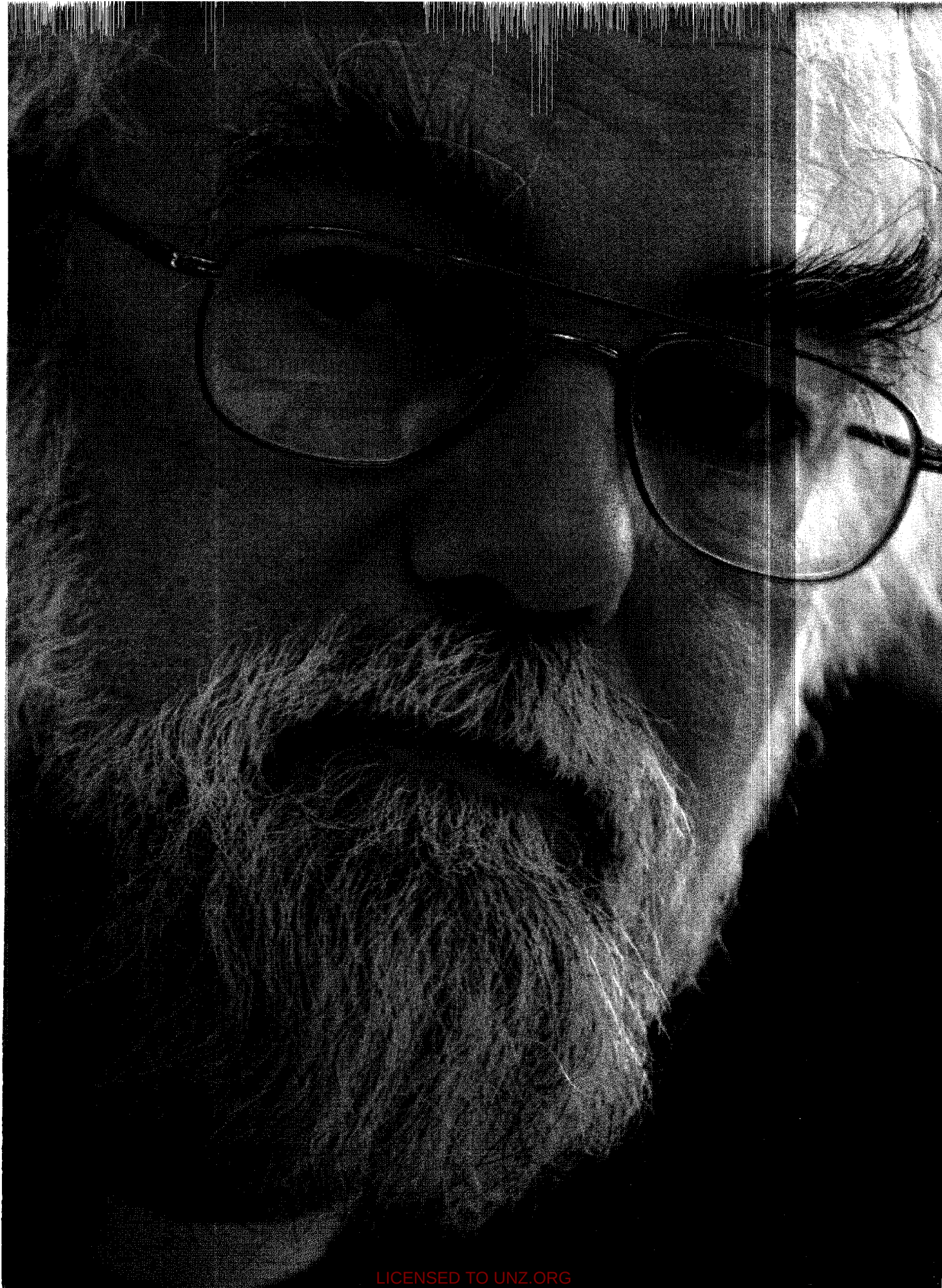
THE VELVET REFORMATION

Paul Elie

“D

EALLY, I PITY HIM,” a man in the kitchen said in a crisp English accent. “Poor Rowan. He is in an impossible position.”

as “the gay bishop” had met between Saint Francis and the kitchen that M



NOT SO LONG ago, Williams was the great hope of liberal religion: a progressive counterpart to the conservative pope. He was elected archbishop of Canterbury in 2002 by the other bishops on a wave of enthusiasm like the one that would later carry Barack Obama into the White House, rooted in surprise that such a person—brilliant, decent, happily married, forward-looking—had reached the top without selling his soul. He had passed swiftly through Cambridge and Oxford to become a leading Anglican theologian and had risen equally swiftly from a small bishopric in Wales to the seat of Canterbury. He was only 52 years old. He spoke four languages and could read half a dozen others. He was a poet who (saints be damned) had a son named Pip and who (Tony Blair be damned) came out early against the war in Iraq. He seemed genuinely conflicted, an open-minded person in a world of ideologues and holy rollers. With his thick gray hair, salt-and-pepper beard, and aviator glasses, he looked like a well-kempt Jerry Garcia. Here at last was a religious leader to believe in.

As Williams began his tenure as archbishop in 2003, though, the ordination of Robinson sent the issue of gay bishops to the head of the agenda. By last summer, with the Lambeth Conference approaching, schism seemed inevitable. Some bishops opposed to homosexual clergy held a rival conference in Jerusalem, denouncing Williams as a liberal pawn. Traditionalists announced plans to “go over” to the Roman Catholic Church or form their own church unless Williams got rid of Robinson. Gay activists circulated an old essay by Williams in which he had eloquently celebrated gay and lesbian relationships; the commentariat mocked him as a holy fool for some approving remarks he had made about Islamic law. Friends of Williams said he might resign. “God has given you all the gifts,” one friend told him, “and as your punishment, he has made you archbishop of Canterbury.”

The schism hasn’t come—not yet. The Anglican Communion, the world’s third-largest group of Christians after the Catholics and the Orthodox, is still standing—a “hugely untidy but very lovable” body, in the words of its most famous member, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the South African Nobel laureate. But its unity has been compromised. In December, a half-dozen bishops broke with the Episcopal Church in the U.S. and announced their plans to found a rival Anglican Community for North America.

It is now, with his office under pressure from both left and right, that Rowan Williams’s real work is beginning. Now he must persuade the aggrieved, quarrelsome people he leads to bear with one another once and for all.

More than the future of a church is at stake. The crisis over homosexuality and the place of gay people in the church is one of the bitterest disputes in Christianity since the Reformation. Christian leaders grasp its importance: that is why they are so agitated about it. But it is hard to tell positions from prejudices. The mainline churches—Presbyterian, Congregationalist—are at the front of the equal-rights parade.

Evangelicals are happily against homosexuality, the black church uneasily against, the fundamentalists fundamentally against. The Vatican insists its teachings on homosexuality are settled doctrine; the Mormons fund ballot measures such as California’s Proposition 8 against gay marriage. Ironically, many Christian leaders in Africa, the legatees of European missionaries, treat homosexuality as a dangerous import from the West.

In all this, the Anglican Communion is a dramatic testing ground, because it—alone among the churches—has sought to have it both ways: at once affirming traditional Christian notions of marriage and family, love and fidelity, and adapting them to the experiences of gay believers.

It is not a church, strictly speaking, but an aggregation of 44 national or regional churches claiming 80 million believers in all. In theory, its leaders have dealt with conflict by trying to follow the *via media*, the middle way between extremes.

In practice, this means that extremes coexist, jostling each other. Sunday service can feature brilliant choirboys, or an organist, or dancing women in kente cloth. C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot were Anglicans; so are George and Barbara Bush. The Episcopal Church has a woman, Katharine Jefferts Schori, as its presiding bishop, while the Church of England has no women bishops at all. If this church cannot find a way forward on homosexuality, then none can—and the clash between gays and Christians over marriage and the like may go on for much of the millennium.

All of this puts Williams in an impossible position. Like the pope, he is at the top of an organization with all the treasures and furniture of empire. But his actual power is closer

to that of the Dalai Lama: the “soft power” of example and persuasion. And just as the Dalai Lama’s commitment to dialogue with China strikes some people as accommodation, so Williams’s willingness to let gay-friendly leaders and anti-gay ones each occupy space in the church can seem indecisive, even bumbling. But it is grounded in the conviction that the true Christian, rather than rushing to judgment, is willing to wait, confident, as Williams has put it, that it is “through the events of conflict and rupture, through the crisis of acceptable religious meanings,” that the way forward is found.

THE SUNDAY BEFORE I was to meet Williams in London, I went to Canterbury. The cathedral looms up over the town as it has since Chaucer’s time, an arched and buttressed slab of shortbread. The town, so long the site of pilgrimage, now hosts the forces of globalization: a thin-crust Italian pizzeria; a Starbucks in the half-timbered cottage adjoining the great arch. And yet the cathedral itself, that day, was pretty vacant: there were more entombed dead bishops than living congregants in the place. An article in the newspaper told of vandals stripping the lead from the roofs of English churches and sending it to China, and I could easily envision a time when the cathedral would be judged redundant and plundered for parts.

Like the pope, Williams is atop an organization with all the furniture and treasure of empire. But his actual power is closer to that of the Dalai Lama.



Williams processing past Anglican bishops from around the world at a service to mark the opening of the Lambeth Conference

I rubbed the foot of the metal carapace of a bishop from the Tudor era, and as I did so I wondered how many of the dead bishops in the place were gay bishops.

There are now more Muslims than practicing Anglicans in Britain, and the Church of England's reason for being is under review. Nominally, its head is the monarch, but Prince Charles's civil marriage to Camilla Parker Bowles poses a problem: the church that Henry VIII founded because Rome would not let him remarry still officially opposes divorce and remarriage. So when Queen Elizabeth dies—she is 82—the church will have to justify its claim as England's “established” church, and its preeminence in the Anglican Communion, as never before in its history.

But the Anglican Communion thrives on crisis and decline. Founded in the 16th century in a king's fit of pique, it was swept along by the Reformation, challenged by Puritanism, weakened by the Oxford Movement of the mid-19th century (which turned many of its best minds Roman Catholic), mocked in its august pieties by the carnage of two world wars. The Anglican funeral for Princess Diana at Westminster Abbey, in 1997, had the air of a last rite for the English Church.

Again and again, though, losses in the Church of England have coincided with gains in the Anglican Communion elsewhere. With the spread of the British Empire, the communion defined itself as “the empire at prayer,” and the church's decline in England was offset by growth in Nigeria and Uganda, in India and Hong Kong. Today, more than four-fifths of the 80 million Anglicans live outside England. Statistically, they don't count for much. Roman Catholicism claims 2 billion souls served. Islam is growing faster: today, while the dozens of churches in the old City of London stand gloriously empty at midday—their forecourts now spots

where City bankers smoke cigarettes and talk on their mobile phones—a mosque on the high street in Hackney is full, with men leaving their shoes in a line on the sidewalk and kneeling in the garden for prayer call. And yet after 500 years the Church of England is still there, marrying and burying, keeping the flame of English-accented faith alive.

It is against this background that Williams emerged. He was born in a Welsh village called Ystradgynlais; shortly before he turned 2, he came down with spinal meningitis, which made him deaf in his left ear. Raised a Presbyterian, at age 10 he went to the Anglican church and persuaded his parents to follow him. As a teenager, he read deeply in Tolkien, Russian fiction, and Welsh poetry; he sought out Eisenstein's films and played the stage manager in *Our Town*. He called himself a socialist but applied to Christ's College, Cambridge, with a plan to study theology. It was 1968, and he was 18. He had been touted as a future archbishop of Canterbury since he was 12.

Williams at Cambridge is remembered as a “saintly person” who took in tramps and worked with disadvantaged children and yet was untouched by the tumult of the time. He steeped himself in Eastern Orthodox theology, the work of the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, and much else—“He seemed to have read everything,” one friend told me. For one course, he wrote his lecture notes in Latin.

He went to Oxford for a doctorate, studying Russian, and he began to explore the priesthood, making retreats at several Roman Catholic abbeys. He also joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and united the two impulses by forming the first of several movements in which he would try to reconcile his love of old-time theology and his progressive politics. After two romances foundered—a would-be girlfriend committed suicide; an engagement with a German exchange student ended abruptly—he was ordained in 1978.

In the priesthood, Williams found the combined role of scholar and leader that has defined him ever since. He took a job at a school in Yorkshire affiliated with a quasi-monastic settlement called the Community of the Resurrection, and there wrote his first book, *The Wound of Knowledge*, about mystics from Augustine to Saint John of the Cross. It is a commanding work, but it is framed with passages that show Williams to be wary of judgments and formulas. He declared:

Christian faith has its beginnings in an experience of profound contradictoriness. [So the church should proclaim] a hidden God, who does not uncover his will in a straight line of development, but fully enters into a world of confusion and ambiguity and works in contradictions.

Williams is a difficult writer, often abstruse and in a hurry to get to the next point. But his books are shards of autobiography, and his account of faith's contradictoriness is an account of his own contradictoriness.

“HE IS THE BEST theological mind in England—there's no one with his combination of breadth and depth,” Timothy Radcliffe told me. We were eating a pub lunch near Blackfriars Hall in Oxford, where Radcliffe, a Dominican friar, first met Williams, in 1973. “People here were awfully surprised when he accepted the call to be a bishop in a small diocese in Wales.”

At Cambridge, Williams had met Jane Paul, a theology student; they would be married in 1981. Academically, he was on his way: he was named dean of Clare College, Cambridge,

then Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford, the top theological post in the university. Yet all the while, he was making his way, prosaically, as a priest—living in a rectory, giving talks in the tensely multiracial east London that the Clash sang about. In 1991, a bishop in Wales put his name forward as a candidate for bishop of Monmouth, even though he had never run a parish, and he got the job.

Leaving Oxford for Wales was like leaving Yale for Ypsilanti. But Williams rerooted himself in the place by mastering Welsh, and in 1999 he was elected archbishop of Wales. He also wrote half a dozen books there. Two stand out; in them, he developed “contradictoriness” into a highly unorthodox approach to leadership.

In *Lost Icons* (2002), Williams mourned the “cultural bereavement” brought on by the loss of “the language of the soul.” This has led, he wrote, to a loss of the self, even as the self is superficially exalted. Free of obligations to one another, we are prone to mistrust and violence. The argument is an essentially conservative one, but instead of retrenchment, Williams urged patience, and conversation: “Current confusion over the family or gender roles or ‘sexual preference,’ over religion and secularity ... and many other things suggests that no consensus is going to appear in a hurry.” In *Anglican Identities* (2003), a compilation of lectures given before his nomination, he suggested what a church (and a church leader) dedicated to such an approach might look like, in a series of portraits of leading Anglicans through the ages—such as the poet and priest George Herbert, whom Williams praised for his “embrace of emotional ambiguity and doubt on the basis of a deep and sophisticated doctrinal conviction.”

The books were well received, but these days another piece of writing gets all the scrutiny. This is “The Body's Grace,” a talk Williams gave to the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement in 1989, at a grave moment in the AIDS crisis. In it he stood back from the tug-of-war over church teachings on sexuality in an attempt to “do justice to the experience, the pain and the variety, of concrete sexual discovery.”

The sources of Christian strictures on homosexuality are many: passages in the book of Genesis and the letters of Saint Paul; church traditions and customs; the notion of men and women as sexually complementary; the teachings that the only place for sex is within marriage and that the essential purpose of sex is the begetting of children. Over time, many of these strictures have been eased, if only informally—through readings of the Bible that acknowledge it as a selective, time-bound document, say, or through a view of sex that acknowledges all the good things about it besides procreation. Some thinkers have sought to argue that the prohibitions against homosexuality are theologically unsound. Others have sought to show them as petty compared with Jesus' concern for oppressed peoples in the Gospels (which have nothing to say about homosexuality). Traditionalists, in response, treat homosexuality as part of a slippery slope—arguing that any easing of the prohibitions against gay sex will undercut the broader Christian view of sexuality, disfiguring not only the institution of marriage but “the nature of man ... created in the image of God,” as Pope Benedict put it in a now-notorious address in December.

CEMETERY MOLES

Most are not blind, but still,
might the concrete burial vaults
be perceived before a tunnel
comes to such a sudden, hard naught?

Though I notice their mounds mostly
down here with the old stones, last row—
those graves that are not only
vaultless but with a wooden casket, too.

And the stories from the sexton?
A filled tooth on a hill whitely shining,
and a mole in a trap one early June,
around its neck a wedding ring.

—Robert Wrigley

Robert Wrigley's most recent collection is *Earthly Meditations: New and Selected Poems* (2006). He teaches in the graduate creative-writing program at the University of Idaho.

Williams took a different approach, focusing on the concept of grace. From a sex scene in Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet*, he drew a definition of grace as beautiful and convincing as any I know.

There may be little love, even little generosity, in Clark's bedding of Sarah, but Sarah has discovered that her body can be the cause of happiness to her and to another. It is this discovery which most clearly shows why we might want to talk about grace here. Grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way: as significant, as wanted.

From there, the essay has the inevitability of a proof in philosophy. Gay people, too, deserve to be wanted sexually—deserve the body's grace. The full expression of this grace through sexual relations takes time and the commitment of the partners to come to know each other—through the commitment of marriage or something like it. Sexual fidelity is akin to religious fidelity—"not an avoidance of risk, but the creation of a context in which grace can abound." For the church to stand in the way of such relationships, straight or gay, is to stand in the way of God's grace.

It was brilliant theology: learned, human, equally open to tradition and to experience. And it was characteristically Anglican, following a *via media* between the traditionalists and the progressives. Unlike the more revisionist members of his communion, Williams didn't apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to the Christian past and assume that old doctrines are unsound simply because they are old. Unlike gender theorists, he didn't treat sexuality as merely a social construct. Unlike the present pope, he didn't change the subject, considering homosexuality chiefly in terms of its effects on a constellation of Christian teachings about human nature. He wrote about homosexuality as a fact of modern life, and used a modern English novel to make his point.

What would a church dedicated to fostering "the body's grace" look like? It is hard to say. Human sexual experience is as fluid and complicated as human religious experience, and no church has ever had a wholly consistent set of sexual teachings, even though (as Williams put it in the essay) "culture in general and religion in particular have devoted enormous energy to the doomed task of getting it right." Saint Paul thought unmarried people shouldn't bother seeking spouses, because the end of time was near; Luther was as enraged by the spectacle of monks with mistresses as he was by the selling of indulgences; the Roman Catholic Church, while championing marriage, has canonized precious few married people as saints, presenting "the married state" as inferior to "the religious life" of a priest or nun. Williams didn't take up this pockmarked history in the essay, and it isn't clear whether he expected Christian prohibitions on homosexual behavior to be rejected or just hoped they would fade away, like the medieval restrictions on lending at interest. But the omission of the big picture actually made his argument more

credible. Here was a church leader considering the shape of sexual experience, not the structure of the church, and doing so through the notion, at once ancient and utterly familiar, of sexual fidelity: as a means of grace; and as a figure for the life of the church, in which believers can know the way forward only by going there together, staying faithful to God and each other even when they disagree.

It was theology like this, with its disregard for Rome, that led the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a curt document in 2000, to characterize the Anglican Communion, and all the other churches rooted in the Reformation, as essentially defective—little better than the "gravely deficient" non-Christian religions. And it was theology like this that led many Anglicans and Episcopalians to conclude that the ordination of openly gay people as bishops was not only permissible, but full of grace.

IN JANUARY 2002, George Carey, the archbishop of Canterbury since 1991, announced that he was retiring. Traditionally, the position alternates between the two "wings" of the Anglican Communion—the low church and the high church, the evangelical wing and the Anglo-Catholic one. Carey was an evangelical. Now it was the Anglo-Catholics' turn, and Williams was put forward right away as a man for all seasons: socially liberal, yet Anglo-Catholic in his spirituality; low church in his Welsh roots and family life, yet high church in his command of the Oxbridge scene.

He was elected easily. In political terms, he had a mandate. But for what? As a writer, lecturer, and preacher, he had devoted hundreds of thousands of words to insisting that there were no obvious solutions to the problems the church faced. And yet, as the Anglo-Catholic candidate, he was now in debt to the wing of the church most agitated and impatient about the "problem" of homosexuality.

Stories began to circulate suggesting that he was in over his head. When Carey sent over his press rep to coach the new archbishop on how to deal with the media, Williams shooed him away, saying, "That's quite all right: I know what I think." When he went to Rome for a meeting with John Paul II, the ailing pope nodded off, for he had no idea who his guest was. (Williams tartly remarked: "Well, I won't see him again.") On the same trip, before a meeting with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Williams joked that he should show up wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the words GRAVELY DEFICIENT. And back in London, the promotion of a little-known priest threatened to splinter the Church of England and send Williams into religiopolitical limbo.

"The Jeffrey John issue is when things came to a head here," Giles Fraser told me, "and when things for Rowan turned positively *Shakespearean*."

Fraser is the vicar of Saint Mary's, Putney, a London church that gives the lie to notions of Anglican decline: a

Gay people, too, deserve to be wanted sexually, Williams has argued. A church that stands in the way of their relationships may be standing in the way of God's grace.

church at once full of families and wide open on gay issues. He met me at Waterloo Station in a black Barack Obama T-shirt and jeans, burly and baldheaded, semi-shaven, looking more like a skinhead punter than a vicar.

In the next hour Fraser, who studied theology under Williams at Oxford, told me the story of the controversial ordination. Jeffrey John is a Welshman and an old friend of Williams's. He is gay and lives with another priest, Grant Holmes, to whom he was joined in a commitment ceremony, yet he is pledged to celibacy—which, his supporters say, makes him technically no different from a straight and unmarried priest. "At one point, when Rowan was bishop [of Monmouth]," Fraser told me, Williams and John "went to the archbishop of Canterbury about homosexuality, and Rowan apparently said to Carey, 'Who pays the price for the gay policy? Gay people do.' And he and Jeffrey lobbied Carey to make a change."

But Carey made no change, and on top of that, he vetoed the nomination of Williams for the job of bishop of Southwark, near the Tate Modern in newly trendy south London, because of Williams's obvious commitment to progress on gay issues. When Williams became archbishop of Canterbury, he sought to turn the tables. John was proposed for a post as the bishop of Reading, a half hour by rail from London, and Williams signed off on the appointment.

Then the campaign against the gay bishop began, with traditionalists on four continents forming a patchwork alliance. Fraser says those in America and England cared nothing about the views of the bishops of Africa until they saw the chance for an alliance against the progressives. They took up the ordination of gay bishops as a wedge issue, and made a show of unity; they claimed that a pro-gay agenda was a new form of imperialism against the global South. "They drafted the Church of Nigeria, with its numerical strength, as a way of raising a ruckus over it. They got the white man's guilt going. The Internet sped it along." And it worked. "Rowan backpedaled," Fraser said. "He asked Jeffrey John to resign."

"It was an utter shock—a complete reversal," the bishop of Washington, D.C., John Bryson Chane, told me. "It emboldened those opposed, because they now knew that this issue was Rowan's weakness: 'Now we've got him by the neck.'"

Desmond Tutu was dismayed, too. "Most of us would have said that Williams would be 'kosher' on the issue," he told me, "and we thought that he would employ his formidable intellectual and linguistic skills to affirm it. But those who were pulling in the other direction were much stronger than we had thought, and as a deeply prayerful and pastoral person, he wanted to accommodate them as fully as possible." Tutu recalled a moment in the 1980s when the bishops of South Africa were divided on gay rights, with some favoring a frank affirmation of gay people and others wanting to "go slow" lest a dispute over gay issues shatter the church's united front against apartheid. But Tutu thought that by 2004, the acceptable time for gay bishops had arrived and that in his good and wise friend Williams they had their champion.

"We did expect a very great deal of him," Tutu said of Williams, choosing his words carefully. "Maybe our expectations were unrealistic."

“YES, IT HAS been more difficult than I expected,” Williams told me. “I don’t think we could have foreseen the depth of bitter feeling that’s arisen in the last three or four years. The sheer built-up resentment about certain kinds of relationships. The resentment toward the United States and England in some former colonial areas. The resentments between liberals and conservatives in the United States. I don’t think I’d registered how deep the culture wars could go.”

We were in his office at Lambeth Palace, a brick pile across the Thames from the Houses of Parliament, and a place appealingly free of pomp and circumstance. The outside walls are sooty from traffic. The attached Gothic church is now a museum of garden history. Instead of a Swiss guard in full Renaissance costume, a porter in shirtsleeves opens an elfin door; you cross a courtyard, push open the timbered main portal yourself, and go up to some rooms that look like a period exhibit in the Victoria and Albert Museum. That day, some workers were hoisting an oil painting of Williams into place in the dining room; but in his office, Williams was surrounded by framed snapshots of his wife and children, which—like the Razor Scooter at the foot of the stairs—served as reminders that he too is a pioneer: the first archbishop of Canterbury in memory to raise a family in the palace.

The Lambeth Conference was a month away. The Fleet Street dailies were hammering at him over Gene Robinson. He leaned close, listening with his good ear, as we moved through the issues. Sharia? He had been misunderstood: his point was not that Islamic law could trump British law, but that religious groups have to be able to draw on their own values in the public square. Tony Blair? His conversion to Catholicism was no surprise—Cherie is a committed Catholic. Leadership? Sure, it had its privileges—such as the opportunity to debate religion at the National Theatre with the antireligious fantasy author Philip Pullman.

He was forthright and thoughtful—yet he seemed to relish the limitations of his office.

"Archbishops become the focus of people's expectations in a very big way," he said. "I want to say, 'Don't expect a magical resolution: I can bring what I've been given, and what the office gives, but I can't guarantee outcomes. So bear with me.'"

I remarked that people saw a difference between his approach as archbishop and his personal views, and I asked how this applied to "The Body's Grace," the essay on gay sexuality. People were calling him a hypocrite: Was he?

"Never in my career did 5,000 words make such a tempest," he said, and went on to distance himself from the essay—but not really. "I wrote it as a professor of theology contributing to an increasingly tense debate in the Church of England. I didn't think, *I'd better be careful what I say, in case I become a bishop one day*. When people ask have I changed my mind, I can only answer, 'Well, the questions I raised there are still on the table. They're still questions. And I still think they're worth addressing.' That essay is my contribution, made in good faith at that time. Now my responsibilities are different. The responsibility is not to argue a case from the top or cast the chairman's vote. It's to hold the reins for a sensible debate—and that's a lot harder than I thought it would be."

Couldn't it be that all the questions having to do with homosexuality were actually being pushed off the table—pushed by him?

"They're not going to go away, and we shouldn't pretend that they are," Williams said. "But my question as archbishop of Canterbury is: How do we address this as a church, not just a group of local religious enthusiasts here and there? The ordination of Gene Robinson had effects that were extremely divisive because people elsewhere felt it committed them to a position they had not arrived at themselves. So part of my job becomes to ask: If there is to be any change, how do you decide what change is appropriate? And that leads to the characterization of being indecisive and all the other things that everybody always says."

Reading his books, I'd been struck by his confident account of the life of faith as "human actions that seek to be open to God's action." How, I asked, did he hope God would act in the crisis?

He paused, steeping his fingers, then answered carefully. "I think the challenge that God is putting to us is this: Granted the differences of conviction, with how much positive expectation and patience can you approach the other? It doesn't mean you stay together at any price, but it is a matter of whether we can demonstrate to the world a slightly different mode of operation than that which the world commonly operates with."

It was a good answer, clear, subtle, truthful, and yet, listening to it, I couldn't help but think of the night before, when Desmond Tutu had led a prayer service at the church of Saint Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square. Several hundred people crowded in. Archbishop Tutu stood at the foot of a staircase and spoke, in his singsong voice, about Robert Mugabe's misrule of Zimbabwe, and although most of us could hardly see him, his blend of confident righteousness and puckish self-deprecation united us in minutes. This was charisma as a form of leadership: the charisma of a man who is not divided internally, who knows what he thinks.

THE EVENTS OF the next few weeks were God's gift to the tabloids. Religion correspondent Chris Morgan of *The Sunday Times* of London committed suicide, by jumping in front of an oncoming train; he had been the best man at Williams's wedding. Two male Anglican priests were in effect married by a third at Saint Bartholomew's, the grand church in Clerkenwell, where *Four Weddings and a Funeral* was filmed. Gene Robinson and his partner of 20 years celebrated their civil partnership in New Hampshire: "I always wanted to be a June bride," Robinson quipped. Robinson journeyed to England and preached at Saint Mary's, Putney, where he was shouted down by a zealot: "Repent, repent! Go back to your own bloody church!" The breakaway bishops held their conference in Jerusalem and got good press. The bishops of England, meeting in a synod in York, approved the ordination of women bishops, allowing no provision for traditionalists to "opt out"; photographs taken during the all-night final session showed Williams, who had sought to accommodate the traditionalists, sitting alone with his head in his hands.

"He has traded truth for unity," one confidant of Williams's told me, "and you just can't do that." Giles Fraser had seen

Williams a few days earlier: "You ask him, 'How are you?' and those eyebrows of his screw up in a half-grimace, half-smile." But he predicted that things would change once the conference began: "You'll see people rallying around Rowan despite their differences because he's holding the line against 'these nasties.'"

While Williams went on retreat to a Benedictine abbey, the press, in effect, wrote his obituary: the Anglican Communion is in organized confusion; the church has lost its head.

It was confusing. And yet, given the tortured history of sex and religion, it was something to see. Here were people openly staking out rival positions on questions of sexuality that whole churches still consider off-limits. Here was the archbishop of Canterbury getting outvoted, the maximum leader yielding to his subordinates. Here was a church grappling with its future in plain sight, and Williams was not shutting down the process but trying to keep it civil and open.

THE 2008 LAMBETH Conference was held in a big blue circus tent on the campus of the University of Kent at Canterbury, overlooking the cathedral, where the bishops met for worship, Bible study, and prayer. They took part in daily small-group meetings grounded in a form of conflict resolution called indaba. A note on the archbishop's Web site explained that the Zulu word describes "a gathering for purposeful discussion ... both a process and method of engagement." Its use was an attempt both to acknowledge the importance of African Christians and to help resolve a crisis. It was ridiculed in the press ("indaba-daba-doo-doo," some bishops were calling it), but it was an ingenious device, for it concealed the conference's roots in the thought of Rowan Williams.

Some 25 years earlier, Williams had written:

In the early Middle Ages, the great Burgundian monastery of Cluny sponsored and encouraged an experiment in conciliation among its feudal neighbors. The arrangement, known as "the truce of God", was that all hostilities should be restricted to three days in the week (Monday to Wednesday). Of course, this was never observed for any length of time ... But it is more than a comical bit of mediaeval eccentricity. Behind it lay the recognition that for baptized Christians ... to be in a state of war with one another was horrible and ridiculous.

Published in 1983, *The Truce of God* was a book about the arms race. But in it Williams argues that conflict resolution is the church's reason for being. The church claims to show

the results of an act of divine reconciliation in terms of a distinctive kind of human community ... It is worth hoping that out of this will emerge, not a programme to resolve all conflict, but at least a sense of what is asked of believers that is different from the prevailing accounts of peace, conflict, guilt and human possibility.

As it was for the arms race in the age of Reagan and Thatcher, so it has been for the standoff over gay bishops in our own day. As 650 bishops converged on Canterbury and two hundred or more stayed away, Williams's goal was a truce of God.

“DID IT WORK? We don’t know yet,” said Timothy Radcliffe, who attended the conference.

On the face of it, Lambeth 2008 was not dramatic. The bishops ate, slept, prayed, waited on line for credentials or coffee; they squirmed on the small folding chairs in the big blue tent. They all went by bus to London to walk the streets in support of the communion’s campaign to halve world poverty by 2015—the kind of work that many bishops feel has been pushed to the side by the disputes over sexuality. And they listened as Rowan Williams gave a series of talks on Anglican unity. “Our communion longs to stay together—but not only as an association of polite friends,” he declared. “It is seeking a deeper entry into the place where Christ stands, to find its unity there.”

The bishops in Canterbury came to some rough-and-ready agreements: they established a new “pastoral forum” to help resolve disputes; they upheld existing moratoria against the ordination of openly gay and partnered people as bishops and against the public church blessing of same-sex unions.

What was dramatic was what did not happen. There was no schism, no walkout, no uproar to serve as fodder for the conflict-hungry press. As the conference ended, the English commentator Austen Ivereigh wrote:

The Archbishop of Canterbury’s press people will be smiling this morning: “How Williams kept his flock together” is the *Guardian*’s headline; “Way ahead found in Church gay row” is the BBC’s; while the *London Times*’s runs: “Bishops back Archbishop Rowan Williams” ... Dr Williams’s strategy of avoiding divisive resolutions and of getting the bishops to listen to each other and understand each other has been a triumph.

“Lord, give me chastity and continence, but don’t give them to me yet.” So asked Saint Augustine, writer and bishop. Rowan Williams seems to be asking something similar: he seems to be asking God, or the forces of history and culture, to make straight the paths for gay people in the Anglican Communion—but not yet.

Has he traded truth for unity? I would say no. In keeping the communion together last summer, he actually moved it in a certain direction. True, he asked the gay bishop not to come, but the traditionalist bishops stayed away voluntarily. In doing so, they ceded the center to the progressives, who made clear that the Anglican middle way is still open.

The founding of a neo-traditional Anglican movement in Wheaton, Illinois, in early December actually confirmed the point. The event made the front page of *The New York Times*, but the facts belied the claims about its impact. The announcement took place not in Jerusalem, but in a borrowed church in a midwestern suburb, and none of the African bishops was present. Although the breakaway bishops claimed the support of 100,000 people, the 800-seat church was half-empty, and already those bishops faced conflicts among themselves—about the status of women priests, for example. It is the threat of schism, and the dramatic Reformation history that the word calls to mind, that gives the dissident bishops their power. Should they actually secede, they would soon be reduced from headlines to footnotes.

Meanwhile, reports of Williams’s demise seem greatly exaggerated. No sooner had the Lambeth Conference ended than *The Guardian* published extracts from letters written in 2000 and 2001 (which had shown up in the mail during the conference) in which Williams had said he thought the church might change its stand on gay marriage. Then news came that Williams’s old friend Jeffrey John was up for a bishop’s job in the Church of Wales, an appointment that Williams—as the head of the Church of England—would have no authority to block. The press made these out to be fresh troubles, but surely they were developments he had anticipated—further movements in the church’s gradual opening to gay people.

So why won’t he say so? Rowan Williams is one of the strongest, subtlest voices in all Christianity. Surely it is right for him to try to moderate the discussion about the place of gay people in the church. But that is not enough. He is a leader, not a stage manager. He should also take part in the conversation; he should somehow declare himself for the course of action he favors—which seems obvious—if only to say that he doesn’t favor it yet.

One day last fall, I attended the weekly noon Eucharist for the staff at Lambeth Palace. It is held in a cryptlike chapel that was once a wine cellar: rough stone walls, plank altar, candles, icon. A hymn was sung, texts were read, and then the 104th archbishop of Canterbury, robed in white, came to the threshold to preach to two dozen of us on Paul’s remarks in the First Epistle to the Corinthians “concerning the unmarried”—the passage in which the saint first advises people, married or unmarried, to hold to the state they are in, and then in the next breath tells them to disregard the bond of marriage after all, for the world is passing away.

I couldn’t help but hear Williams’s description of the saint as a description of himself, a man saved from his contradictoriness by his obvious integrity. “That’s a hard text to preach on,” he began. “Paul is thinking on his feet: ‘Of course on the other hand,’ he says, and ‘Well, that is true, but however ...’ But Paul, for all his hemming and hawing, has a clear point to make. This is not *it*. Capital letters. I. T. Whatever you’re doing—your job, your passion—there is something more.”

THESE WAS A reception afterward, and when I found myself near Williams, I maneuvered around to the side of his good ear. In the Anglican Communion, I said to him, all the changes that the traditionalists have resisted—married priests, women priests, openly gay priests—have eventually come to pass. Did he think there would be openly gay bishops in the Church of England in 10 years? Was it just a matter of time?

“I highly doubt it,” he said. “I don’t think we’ll have progressed that far in our discernment process.”

It was not a *no*, just a *not yet*. Even as he declined to endorse the ordination of gay bishops, with that roundabout phrase about progress he left the possibility open—the possibility that it would come to pass eventually, and that he would think it a good thing, too. ■

Paul Elie, a senior editor with Farrar, Straus and Giroux, is the author of *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*.

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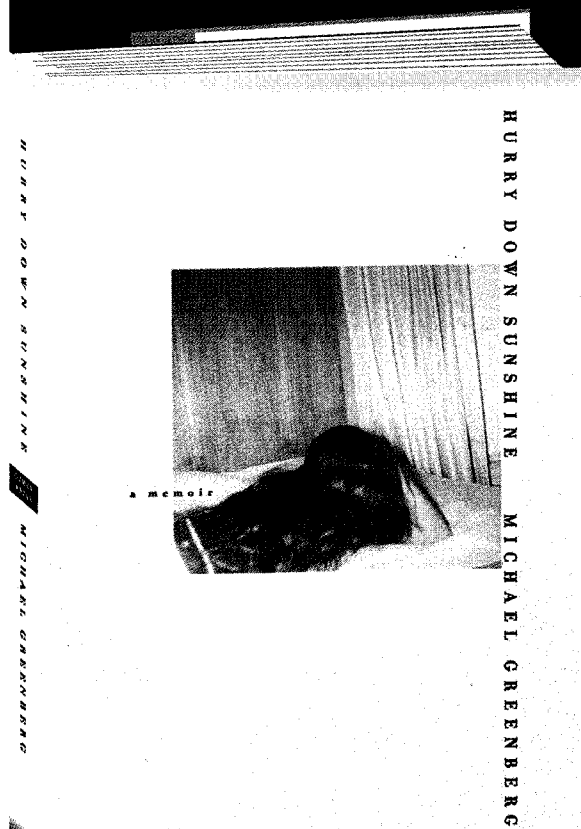
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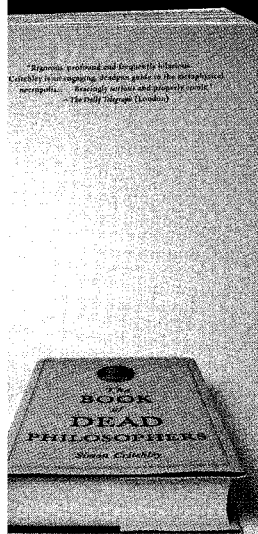
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BOOKS

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Narciso Rodriguez at work

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Designers' Designers

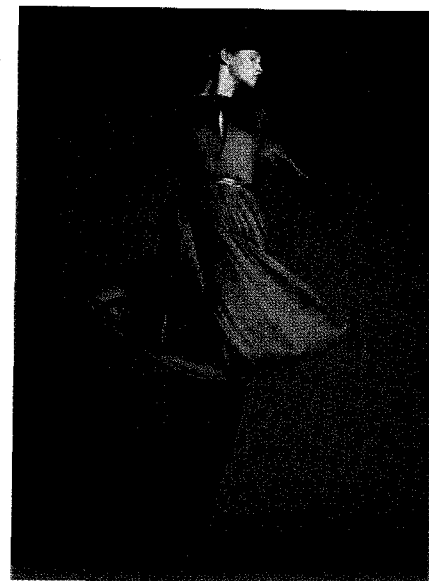
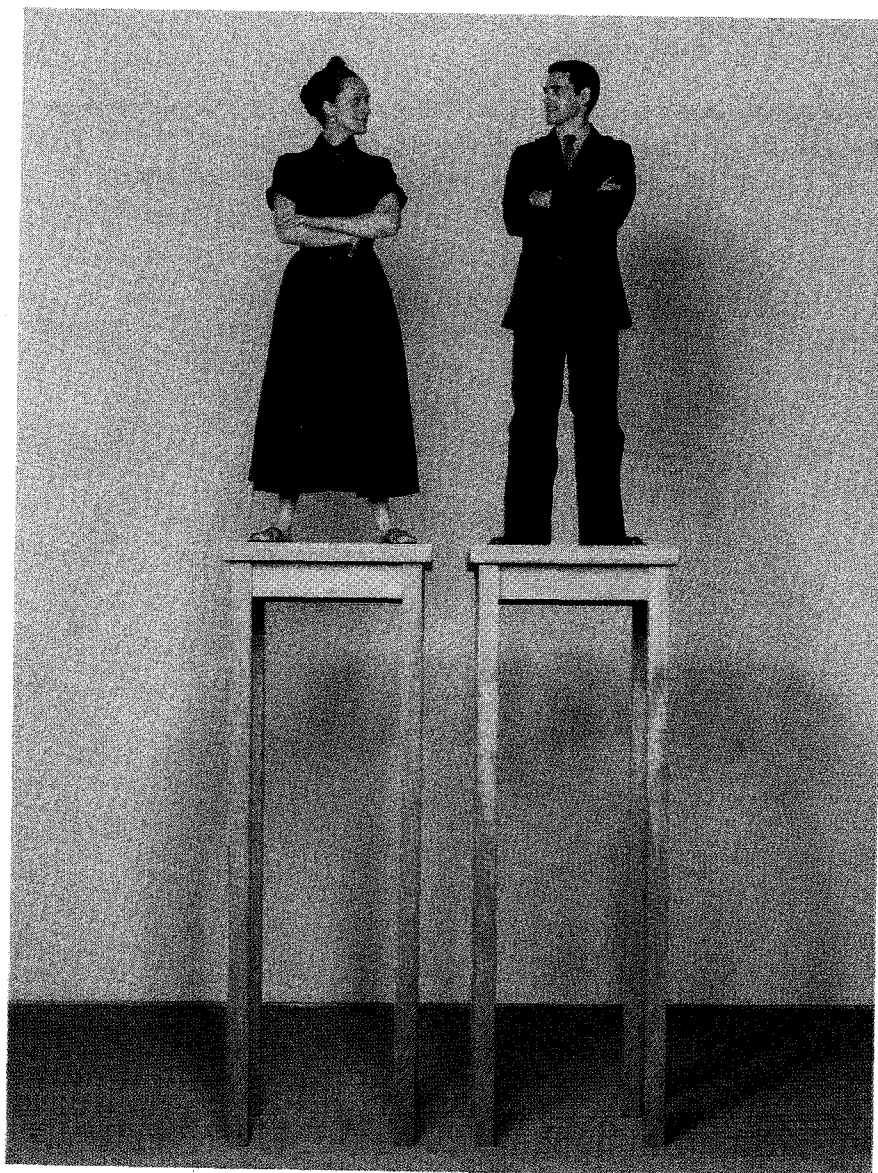
THREE BOOKS ON THREE COUTURIERS WHO RANK AMONG THE GREATEST AMERICA HAS PRODUCED

By Benjamin Schwarz

GEOFFREY BEENE was the subject of what must be the most influential article in U.S. fashion history when the critic Kennedy Fraser wrote that his profitable, stiffly constructed dresses resembled concrete. Her appraisal provoked Beene's creative awakening and radical transformation. He devoted his

next 30-odd years (he died in 2004) to visionary, demi-couture work, exploring the relationship between clothing and women's bodies and cannily arranging licensing deals for eyewear and the like to subsidize this uncompromising pursuit. Thanks to his ingenious cutting and seaming, his dresses became lighter and lighter, purer and purer. They skimmed and enveloped their wearers' bodies; they revealed and eroticized the

unexpected—the rib cage, the clavicle, the small of the back. Beene's friend of nearly 20 years, Kim Hastreiter, the editor and co-founder of the chronicle of cutting-edge fashion and design, *Paper* magazine, has produced *Geoffrey Beene: An American Fashion Rebel* (Assouline), an astute book that uses detailed photography to reveal specific qualities of his work, from his use of zippers to the wit that permeates his creations.



Left: Isabel Toledo (in a dress of her design) and Ruben Toledo; above: a Geoffrey Beene dress

Narciso Rodriguez, 48, idolized Beene. A master of clean silhouettes created by meticulous construction based on corsetry, Rodriguez uses intricate seaming that defines the body (as did Beene). His precisely cut, almost stripped-down dresses are hence sometimes labeled “sexy,” which may or may not be true but misses the point, which is that he consistently focuses on how his garments fit and move (as did Beene). *Narciso Rodriguez*, by Narciso Rodriguez and Betsy Berne (Rizzoli), makes this point clear, especially in a section detailing Rodriguez’s collaboration with the choreographer Christopher Wheeldon. The book concentrates less on Rodriguez’s creations than on the inspirations behind them. In the hands of a less assured designer—

one less devoted to the proposition that the craft of dressmaking largely defines the form of the dress—this approach could be god-awful: jejune designers like nothing better than to attach a heavy-handed “theme” to each season’s collection. (“I hate a theme,” Rodriguez has said. “You do have all these influences, but you try not to make anything look too literal.”) As the book shows, though, Rodriguez intelligently uses, say, photographs of bridges to inform how he’ll crisscross straps.

Rodriguez has declared that Isabel Toledo—like himself, raised in a Cuban family in working-class northern New Jersey—“is, by far, the designer I admire most today.” (Both are among Michelle Obama’s favorite designers; she wore Rodriguez’s red-and-black sheath at the

Grant Park victory celebration.) Toledo, who eschews seasonal collections and runway shows and whose tiny output (about 700 pieces a year) is sold at only a handful of boutiques and specialty stores, has inherited Beene’s title as the designer’s designer. Her work, defined by an almost surreal architectural purity, mature eroticism, and the marriage of radically innovative construction with the practical (plenty of pockets!), is regularly and rightly praised by the cognoscenti as the product of genius and craftsmanship comparable to Balenciaga’s. *Isabel Toledo: Fashion From the Inside Out*, by Valerie Steele and Patricia Mears (Yale), which will accompany a mid-career retrospective of Toledo’s work at the Fashion Institute of Technology this summer, emphasizes how Toledo’s profound understanding of the guts of a dress drives her innovations. The authors also perceptively assess the intense collaboration between Isabel and Ruben Toledo, her artist-and-illustrator husband of 25 years (they met in ninth grade). Resolutely indifferent to trends, Toledo has the highest aspirations: “I want to make a garment that lasts. It’s not just yours. It should be your daughter’s eventually.” This book testifies to the soundness of her goals. ■

Benjamin Schwarz is *The Atlantic*’s literary editor and national editor.

FROM LEFT: KARL LAGERFELD; ANDREW ECCLES FROM GEOFFREY BEENE (ASSOULINE)

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Class Dismissed

A NEW STATUS ANXIETY IS INFECTING AFFLUENT HIPDOM.

By Sandra Tsing Loh

SOME 25 YEARS have passed since the publication of Paul Fussell's naughty treat *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*, and I think this quarter-century mark merits the raising of either a yachting pennant, an American flag, or a wind sock with the Budweiser logo (corresponding to Fussell's demarcations of Upper Class, Middle Class, and Prole). For readers who somehow missed this snide, martini-dry American classic, do have your assistant Tessa run out and get it immediately (Upper), or at least be sure to worriedly skim this magazine summary over a low-fat bagel (Middle), because Fussell's bibelot-rich tropes still resonate.

Back in 1983, Fussell—author of the renowned book *The Great War and Modern Memory*—argued that although Americans loathe discussing social class, this relatively new, rugged country of ours did indeed have a British-style class system, if less defined by money than by that elusive quality called taste. To be sure, Fussell's universe is somewhat passé, in that its population is almost exclusively white (with the Mafia thrown in for color), and the three “classes” in his opening primer conform to clichés we might think of as Old-Money WASP, Midwestern Insurance Salesman, and Southern Trailer Trash. The top classes, according to Fussell (with a hint of Nancy Mitford), drink Scotch on the rocks

in a tumbler decorated with sailboats and say “Grandfather died”; Middles say “Martooni” and “Grandma passed away”; Proles drink domestic beer in a can and say “Uncle was taken to Jesus.”

The still-fresh guilty pleasure of the reading, however, comes from the insistent unspooling, with an almost Ptolemaic complexity, of Fussell's cocktail-party-ready argument. (I picture him in rumpled tie elbowing his laughing-head-into-her-hands hostess while he gestures breezily with a glass of chardonnay—white wine itself being much classier in 1983 than now.) By chapter two, Fussell is revealing that he believes there are actually nine classes (Top Out-of-Sight, Upper, Upper Middle, Middle, High Proletarian, Mid-

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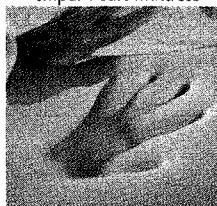
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Proletarian, Low Proletarian, Destitute, Bottom Out-of-Sight). His *Heart of Darkness* journey wends boldly past unicorns (High Prole), ladies' thimble collections (Middle), men's hobbies ("One must learn that fishing in fresh water is classier than in salt, and that if salmon and trout are the things to catch, a catfish is something by all means to avoid catching"), the Sunbrella hat (for which he reserves a timeless—and I think appropriate—ire), "parody" hats favored by the upper-middle class such as Pat Moynihan's tweedy bog cap, and the perils of the dark-blue visored "Greek fisherman's cap" as advertised in *The New Yorker* (New Yorker ads themselves being, Fussell explains, crucibles of middle-class high anxiety). God forbid you get that cap in black leather ("Only six things can be made of black leather without causing class damage to the owner: belts, shoes, handbags, gloves, camera cases, and dog leashes"). He even threads through the subtle lexicon of tie patterns—from "amoeba-like foulard blobs" (Upper), signal flags (Upper Middle), musical notes (sliding downward), to OH HELL, IT'S MONDAY (quite low), with special horror reserved for the southwestern bola ("Says the bola, 'The person wearing me is a child of nature, even though actually eighty years old'"). Literally no stone—or soapstone—goes unturned.

The high-prole bathroom reveals two contradictory impulses at war: one is the desire to exhibit a "hospital" standard of cleanliness, which means splashing a lot of Lysol or Pine Oil around; the other is to display as much fanciness and luxury as possible, which means a lurch in the opposite direction, toward fur toilet seat covers and towels which don't work not merely because they are made largely of Dacron but also because a third of the remaining threads are "gold."

The experience of reading (and re-reading) *Class* is akin to wiping goggles one didn't know were fogged. Fussell's methodology settles into the brain like a virus; one soon cannot stop nano-categorizing one's world. A quarter

century later, most of Fussell's categories live on—if with some fiscal damage. Fussell's topmost denizens were "out of sight" in hilltop manses at the end of long, curving driveways. The billionaires in Michael Tolkin's hilariously mordant *The Return of the Player* are even farther out, prow-jousting at sea

in their satellite-technology-equipped yachts. Indeed, this novel is such a teeth-gnashingly precise class almanac, that Tolkin should surely replace Tom Wolfe as our modern-day high-society-anxiety chronicler (at least of the West Coast variety). Tolkin is particularly hard on his people, wealthy Los Angeles Jews, a variation on the American upper class with their conspicu-

ously consuming Hebraism. At a bar mitzvah at a Reform synagogue that shares a driveway with Milken High (named deftly not for Michael but for the brother):

Torahs dressed in embroidered covers and silver breastplates stood on the branches of a sculpted tree behind a sheer curtain, like expensive boots in a winter window display.

In attendance is a "fiesta" of rich Jews:

the trim skeptical men and their two categories of wives, all of them brilliantly educated, some of them successful professionals themselves, others still drifting on the messy alibi supplied by their genuinely screwed-up relationship with their genuinely screwed-up mothers, but all of them, pediatric endocrinologists, failed Tibetan wool importers, soccer moms and private school committee volunteers, recognizing each other's clan by a signal from within an unfakable right for their chaotic anxieties and complaints to take up space around them.

This isn't to say that Hollywood Jews' counterparts, Upper-Class Gentiles, are dead. Their ethos (or at least the ethos of those who aspire to Upper-Class Gentilehood) is lovingly enshrined, for instance, in *Vanity Fair*, with its wide-eyed revelations from the dusty alcoves of Kennedy history and obsessive detailing of the summerings, winterings, and

CLASS

By Paul Fussell
TOUCHSTONE

THE RETURN OF THE PLAYER

By Michael Tolkin
GROVE/ATLANTIC

THE BIG SORT

By Bill Bishop
HOUGHTON
MIFFLIN

fallings of obscure Eurotrash. (Though how I devour like stale-but-still-tasty Mon Cheri candies Dominick Dunne's dispatches about, oh, "Arch Viscount Fernando of Capri's 80th birthday party—he's a Scorpion!" featuring murky snaps out from which inevitably loom, like death and taxes, Barry Diller and the shiny gorgon head of Diane von Furstenberg.) Meanwhile, tacking starboard then port around Graydon Carter's fresh, startled horror over the latest outrages of the Bush administration (and I will miss those) are soft-focus ads pimping what appear to be blond, pink-argyle-sweater-clad, Ralph Lauren-fraternity Hitler Youth who look 30 seconds away from clubbing me (a light-mocha-hued person) over the head with an oar, or perhaps with a Nautica-logo polo mallet, sunglasses by Fendi.

Magazine reading for Middles, though (moving the goalposts in from both coasts), is best defined by the literary output of staid airlines such as Southwest, Delta, and Continental (as opposed to the more edgily cosmopolitan JetBlue and Virgin). Luxuriously Middle are those sumptuous photo ads for restaurants like Ruth's Chris Steak House (Why two names?) featuring mute, glistening hillocks of beef. (What is it about a close-up of a filet's dewy, reddened inside that so tempts the in-flight reader?) And how exquisitely State Farm Middle Manager are the matchmaking ads of Selective Search and It's Just Lunch!, with their come-hither phalanxes of kitten-nosed executive female "lunch directors"? Their unquestioned queen, I've ferreted out, is President Barbie Adler, with her strangely hypnotic execu-speak about eliminating "the pain points" in the dating process, as though the solution to contemporary romance is a Tucson-based chiropractic laser procedure performed on tibiae thrown out in racquetball.

The experience of reading Class is akin to wiping goggles one didn't know were fogged. Fussell's methodology settles into the brain like a virus; one soon cannot stop nanocategorizing one's world.

FUSSELL BELIEVED IN an escape pod from this tyranny of classhood: residence in a special American psycho-emotional space called "category X." (Fussell borrowed his notion from Matthew Arnold's analysis of the three British classes—even a century earlier, Arnold was describing this fourth set of "aliens.") Fussell's Xs were essentially bohemians, the young people who flocked to cities in search of "art," "writing," and "creative work," ideally without a supervisor. Xs disregarded authority; they dressed down on every occasion; they drank no-name liquor ("Beef-eater Gin and Cutty Sark Scotch betray the credulous victim of advertising, and hence the middle class"); they wore moccasins and down vests (in 1983, Fussell considered L. L. Bean and Lands' End natural X cloth-

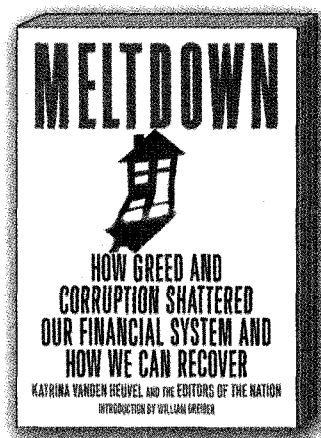
iers); they carelessly threw out, unread, their college alumni magazines.

Roger that. Even today, I think one's relation to one's alma mater is fraught with haute-bourgeois peril. In descending order of coolness are:

1. Dropped out of prestigious college;
2. Graduated from prestigious school, never bring it up unless asked—then as joke;
3. Graduated from prestigious school with honors, bring up quickly, no irony;
4. Graduated, have become garish, cheerful head of alumni booster committee.

I say "coolness" instead of "class" because that's how desperately I cling to my tattered X membership card, even as I creep toward 50 (What? Haven't you heard? Fifty is the new 36! Clock? What's a clock? I obey no clock!). Fussell argued that Xs wear T-shirts without lettering or only with "interesting" lettering, and it's true that, even today, I treasure my—yes, cliché—Ramoness T-shirt. But wait!

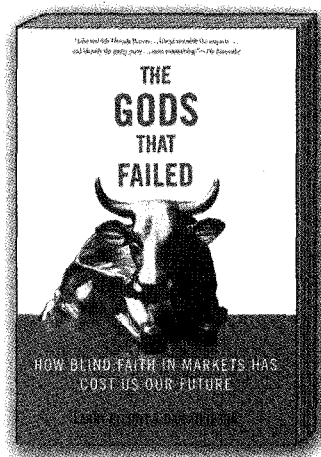
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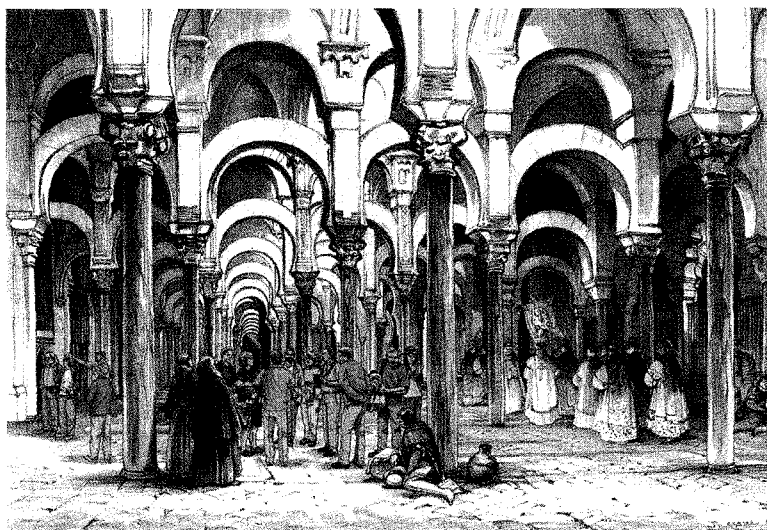
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MARTIN RANDALL TRAVEL

This is not the brand-new Ramones T-shirt sported so conspicuously by needy soul-patched 50-ish alternadads at the Silver Lake dog park. If you actually bought the black Ramones tee the year it came out, the lettering will be so faded (as mine is), you literally cannot read it. It looks like a linty rag. So there. Granted, this sense of X superiority is an absurd stance for a fanny-pack-wearing mother in Desitin-smeared drawstring Target pants who never particularly liked the Ramones and who, like any obedient dog, now dutifully listens to public radio while driving her kids about town in a McDonald's-bag-strewn Toyota minivan. However, I believe it is the very *je-ne-sais-quoi* boldness with which I saucily steer my bird-shit-bedecked "ride" into scattering flocks of L.A. valet parkers that marks the true rebel. As Fussell puts it:

When an X person, male or female, meets a member of an identifiable class, the costume, no matter what it is, conveys the message "I am freer and less terrified than you are."

I believe the *true* X philosophy is to try to destroy "hipness" wherever one sees it. (Some 40-something mom friends and I thought the way to drain the pagan power from Burning Man would be to set up our own Jenny Craig camp there. And, if we get child care, we will!)

Sadly, though, rebellion is not the outlier stance it once was. Xs are no longer America's free. By 2009, Xs are neither what Fussell called the "classless class" nor an "unmonied aristocracy" with the freedom of the Out-of-Sights, if without the bucks. (Note: tickets to Burning Man start at more than \$200.) Today's Xs do not "occupy the one social place in the U.S.A. where the ethic of buying and selling is not all-powerful." Thanks to the economic rise, over the past three decades, of what Richard Florida (betraying a wee bit too much admiration) calls "the creative class," Xs now rule the world. Or, as David Brooks wrote in *Bobos in Paradise* (*Bobos* is short for "bourgeois bohemians"): "Dumb good-looking people with great parents have been displaced by smart, ambitious, educated, and antiestablishment people with scuffed shoes." Today's Xs define themselves largely by what they consume. This is

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particularly well articulated, I think, in an *L.A. Times* home-section piece I clipped in 2005 about Brian and Gigi Levangie Grazer—think film mogul and writer/trophy wife making do in a modest 11,000-plus-square-foot home complete with little pads and pencils for brainstorming poised, as I pictured it, on every renewable-bamboo table. (Children: Asia and Lennon? Upper-class pediatric frailties: sugar issues, lactose intolerance, wheat allergies, Asperger's, difficulty with gestalt thinking?—as opposed to the Old World ruling-class pediatric scourge of hemophilia.)

Charity itself is complicated when one hates to admit that one rules. Although old-school WASPs might tinkle their G-and-Ts while hosting an annual spring benefit for The Poor, the creative class will throw a star-studded fete to combat a politically fashionable disease, with celebs relaying anecdotes about personal frailty (as detailed in their candid new addiction memoirs). They can be rich and feel vaguely anti-establishment at the same time. The New World is all Richard Branson interviewed by Charlie Rose onstage at the Clinton Conference on Global ... Whatever—with a faint chunky mix-in of Third World Poverty. (The creative class usually prefers far-away poor people to the local variety, and always prefers the “ethnic” poor to the white kind.)

At network-TV meetings, millionaire 20-something comedy writers see how low they can go with torn jeans, T-shirts, and grimy Red Sox caps, while the only guys in coat and tie on the lot are the Honduran valet parkers. That grimy baseball cap signifies *Harvard Lampoon* alum, which opens the door to Hollywood comedy riches, in a process that can seem, to the uninitiated, truly bewildering and mysterious. X people offer jobs to those they recognize, by certain nuanced clues, as members of their creative tribe,

which makes people fear that they might mistransmit a code—bringing us back to Fussell's rubric of class being announced in clothing, lifestyle, and speech. What will best fire the small talk, and the resulting intimate connection, that invigorates the start of a pitch meeting? Mets cap? Cubs cap? Yankees cap? What if you went

to UC Davis instead of Harvard—are you not as funny? What is the right note of irony to apply to your hip-hop speech, given that you are, in actuality, suburban, 33, and white? Oh, yes, the newfangled Xs now have not only the money, but also the anxiety. It's easy to be banished from the land of affluent hipdom—especially now that the scratch that pays for all that hipness has been depleted. When I see those TV commercials of silverback Baby Boomers sprint-

ing with vintage surfboards toward ever-higher-yielding money-market funds, I feel both Boomer derision and a gnawing dread that my own funds are not similarly accruing (and in fact they are not—but maybe, to offset the losses, Brian Grazer will option my book?). Although in Fussell's day, the denizens of the middle class were the more piquant sufferers of “status panic,” today the most metaphysically fearful group is, in fact, the Xs.

It's not just that Romantic Selfhood—Walter Pater's notion of burning with a “hard, gemlike flame,” which is the true emotional underpinning of bohemia—has become commodified. Fairly harmless is the \$4 venti soy latte purchased amid Starbucks's track lighting, Nina Simone crooning, and a story about Costa Rican beans that have sailed around the world just to see YOU! It's that Selfhood has its own berth now in the psychiatrist Abraham Maslow's “hierarchy of needs,” a generational shift presaged by American sociologists who, as early as the 1970s, posited that, while hungry people are concerned about survival, those who

grow up in abundance will hunger for self-expression. In the relatively affluent post-Cold War era, the search for self-expression has evolved into a desire to not have that self-expression challenged, which in turn necessitates living among people who think and feel just as you do. It's why so many bohemians flee gritty Los Angeles for verdant Portland, where left-leaning citizens pride themselves on their uniform, monotonously progressive culture—the Zipcars, the organic gardens, the funky graphic-novel stores, and the thriving alternative-music scene. (In the meantime, I've also noticed that Portland is much whiter than Los Angeles, disconcertingly white.)

Further, as Bill Bishop argues in his disturbing, illuminating *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*, the creative class's quest for lifestyle self-determination has had a giant and, in some ways, deleterious national effect. In the past, U.S. migration patterns were based on economics and available jobs. By contrast, writes Bishop, over the past 30 years, “there was a surge of people who wanted to live in cities for what could only be social—or even aesthetic—reasons.” In Austin alone, the percentage of people with a college education went from 17 percent in 1970 to 45 percent in 2004. In 60 years, the total population of San Francisco stayed roughly the same, but the average house price rose ninefold, from \$60,162 to nearly \$550,000 (compared with Cincinnati, where the average house price increased from \$65,000 to \$145,000). New “superstar cities” (a term coined by the economist Joseph Gyourko) were

metro areas where residence had become, in essence, a luxury good. People paid for the privilege of being in cities such as San Francisco, Seattle, San Jose, Portland, Los Angeles, New York, Austin, and Raleigh-Durham because they wanted to live there, not because they expected an economic return.

In short:

The function of cities had changed. Their reason for being—and their residents' reason for living within them—was no longer to produce salable

The search for self-expression has evolved into a need to have that self-expression unchallenged, which in turn necessitates living among people who think and feel just as you do.

goods and services. The city's new product was lifestyle.

These locales became “‘consumer cities’—metro areas that catered to the well-paid, well-educated people who moved there.”

Counterintuitively, an over-clustering of educated people in one region is not always a social boon. Citing the research of the political scientist Diana Mutz, Bishop shows that, startlingly,

education is presumed to nurture an appreciation of diversity: the more schooling, the greater the respect for works of literature and art, different cultures, and various types of music. Certainly, well-educated Americans see themselves as worldly, nuanced, and comfortable with difference. Education also should make us curious about—even eager to hear—different political points of view. But it doesn't. The more educated Americans become—and the richer—the less likely they are to discuss politics with those who have different points of view.

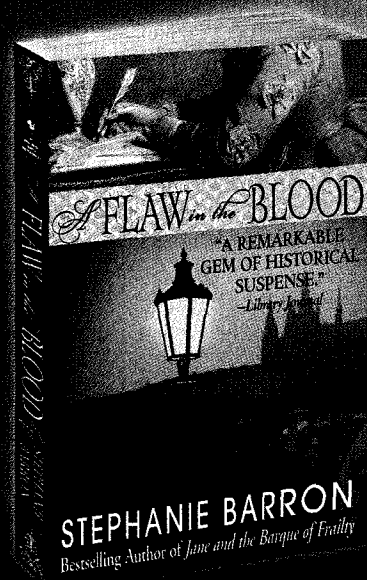
In 2000, the research of Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, showed that the correlation between the health of civic culture and the affluence of the local economy was actually negative; the highest-tech cities tended to have the lowest rate of civic connections. I think of the Silicon Valley runner guy we met in San Francisco who, when we showed him a set of lost car keys we'd found on the path in Golden Gate Park, said: “I wouldn't trust the police with those. Post a notice on Craigslist!” For all of Richard Florida's celebration of San Francisco, the city has been hemorrhaging families with children at an alarming rate, because of the creative class's flight from public schools there. (Florida proposes some remedies for these problems in “How the Crash Will Reshape America,” page 44.)

IT WILL BE interesting to see, now that the apocalypse has arrived, how various modes of American status-striving will be rejiggered, particularly those predicated on amassing large amounts of debt.

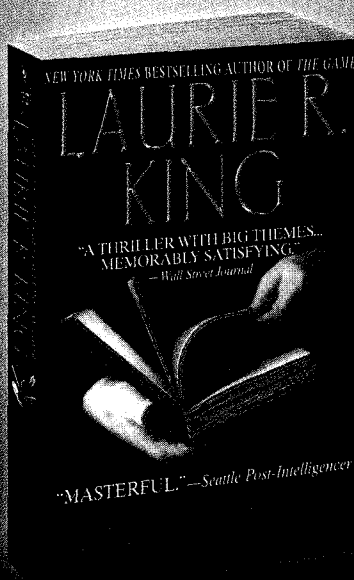
Never mind Fussell's outdated notion that sartorial fearlessness belongs to the sloppy-T-shirt X class; the insouciant fun will probably now belong to the few defiant outlying WASPs still quaffing Bloodys before noon and tumbling off the dock in lime-green-and-blue whale pants. Or to those highest of High Proles called pimps. (For extraordinary archiving of such, see the classic HBO documentary *Pimps Up, Ho's Down*, featuring an annual pimp awards ball with gents in elaborately tailored suits, watch fobs, and bowlers, in “fuck you” colors of hot purple and tangelo, who explode out of ornate Freddie Munster Model T cars.)

As for the Upper Middles and their betters, what about Tolkin's formulation of “an unfakable right for their chaotic anxieties and complaints to take up space around them”? That really is financially viable only for the real upper class (to wit, not the millionaire but the ten-millionaire or more). The first tower to fall, for middle-class families, will be that fiduciary meritocratic yoke, the expensive education. Increasingly,

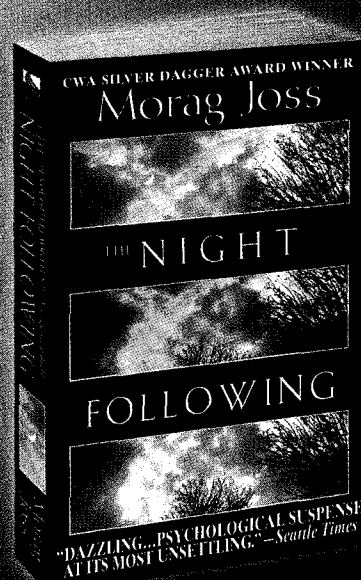
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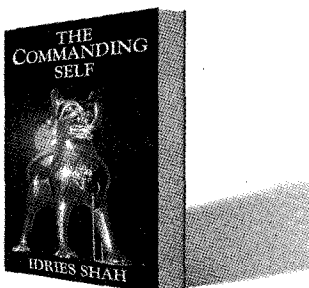
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college tuitions are outstripping the middle class's ability to pay them. Although 20-somethings going for "hard" educations in things like medicine (aka "the Koreans," quipped a professor friend) may still see a return, the high-water days of the \$50,000-a-year liberal-arts education are drawing to a close. (I think of the Boomer parents of the Wellesley student recently trolling all of us—their professional associates—for an "exciting summer job" for their daughter. All I had to offer was babysitting. Inquired the Wellesley girl: "Can you send me a job description?" I wrote back: "BABYSITTING! \$12 an hour!" She took it.) By contrast, the life of the High Prole may start to look reliable, and good—have you seen what plumbers make? Can your Ivy League-trained nephew do that?

But perhaps these times of hardship will see a return of the true bohemian, as in the days when the Left Bank was actually squalid. Stylistically, some artistic people are returning to thrift chic (either Goodwill retro wear, or something akin to the party a girlfriend threw recently called "Bitch Swap," where you trade around the rags you're tired of). Surely now the honestly eco-conscious will lead a bold return to—gasp!—tap water. (Because what's worse for the environment than drinking water ... out of plastic bottles ... *flown in* from Fiji?) As Starbucks stores close around us, what's more nostalgically amusing than Folgers Crystals? To save gas money, I'd forecast a mass movement from cars to cruiser bikes, but for that you must live in a groovy, bike-friendly (expensive!) city. However, listen for poignant, witty Frank O'Hara stories about transformative experiences that occur on public transportation (in the rain), on *This American Life*. As Borders stores shutter, perhaps we'll see a reflowering of public libraries. In any case, unable to secure those astronomical loans, more Xers will have to start rubbing shoulders with The Other, living in truly mixed

neighborhoods, next door to such noncreative types as Kohl's-shopping back-office workers and actual not-yet-ready-for-their-close-up-in-Yoga-Journal immigrants. More members of a once-creative class may now have to

live *like* immigrants, if not 12 to a single-family home, at least with roommates, or other family members—and not necessarily one's favorites. Speaking of which, even the self-actualized may not be able to afford the heady liberation of divorce. Get the Rick Warren tapes out! Enlightened women may have to stay not just married but in for the night—what with restaurants being so unaffordable,

home life will be all about the hearth, the candlelight, the guitar (and not a vintage Les Paul).

This economic catastrophe is teaching the Xers that their prized self-expression and their embrace of personal choice leads to ... the collapse of capitalism. Time to inculcate not those self-satisfyingly hip and rebellious values—innovation! self-fulfillment!—cherished by the creative class (a class, after all, that includes in its ranks those buccaneering entrepreneurs who've led us down the primrose path), but those staid and stolid values of the bourgeoisie: industry, sobriety, moderation, self-discipline, and avoidance of debt. Out with the grungy baseball cap (cheap on its own, but not so thrifty when accompanied by those other accoutrements of formerly affluent hipdom—the iPhone, the rain-forest-safari vacation, the richly appointed LEED-certified house) and in with the dowdy JCPenney suit. The age of narcissistic creative-class strivers has brought this country cool new neighborhoods and an infinitely better selection of coffees and greens, but it has also brought shameful social stratification and a consumer binge that our children's children may well be paying off. The Xer is dead. Long live the burgher! ■

Sandra Tsing Loh's latest book is *Mother on Fire*.

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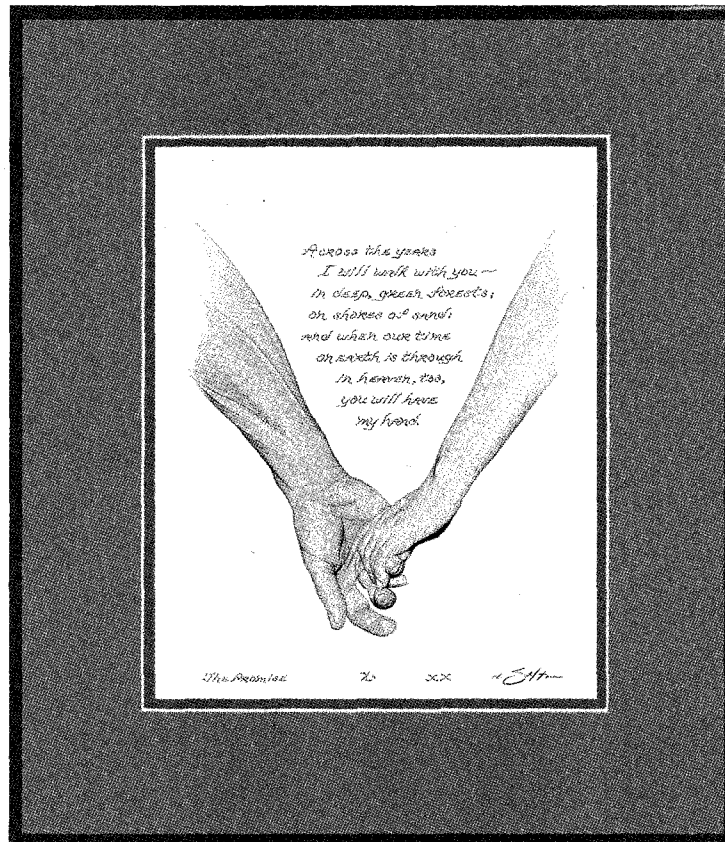
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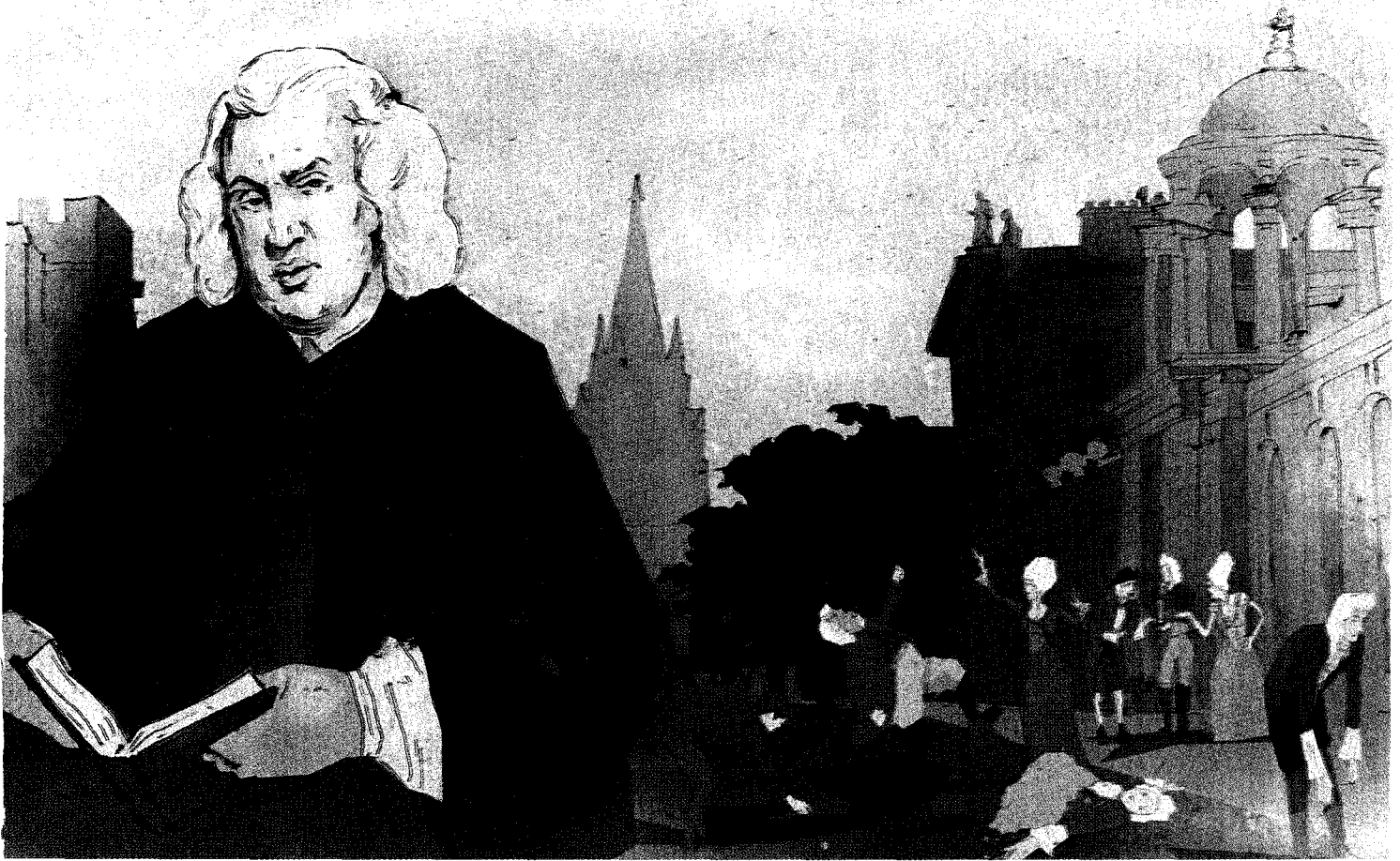
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to designate a tireless philanderer. In 18th-century England, John Wilkes was the leader of a radical political faction known as the Patriots. In Dr. Samuel Johnson's Tory view, affiliation with that subversive party was "the last refuge of a scoundrel": this now is construed as an attack on all those—most often Tories themselves—who take

shelter in a too-effusive love of country. The life and sayings of Johnson were so replete with ironies that perhaps it is no surprise to find literalness exacting its effect over the course of time. Peter Martin's outstanding new biography gives the best account I have yet read

of another of its subject's celebrated observations—"Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." In 1777, a popular and fashionable clergyman named William

Dodd was sentenced to death for forgery. Having read Johnson's *Rambler* essays on the vagaries of the criminal-justice system, he bethought

himself of the good doctor as a man who might be persuaded to intercede for him. Johnson took up the case for clemency and wrote not only a petition to the monarch, as if penned by Dodd, but also a sermon, "The Convict's Address to His Unhappy Brethren," which the



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hapless reverend delivered to his fellow inmates of Newgate Prison. So affecting was this address that it helped complete the swing of public opinion in favor of a pardon for Dodd. But authority was unflinching, and the wretched cleric was duly and publicly executed. There were those who doubted that he had possessed "the force of mind" required to have written such a fine sermon himself, and those who even suspected that Johnson might have been the "ghost" writer in the case. It was to quell such speculation that Johnson made the remark, which we can therefore understand not as a cynical and clever one but as a very elegant and modest disclaimer. Having been disappointed by the failure of Walter Jackson Bate to tell this important tale aright in his immense 1978 biographical study, I was full of admiration for Peter Martin for managing to summarize it so deftly.

Not that Johnson was by any means incapable of cynicism. He made quite a little income by writing anonymous sermons for a two-guinea fee, and he assured a friend's newly ordained son:

"The composition of sermons is not very difficult. Invent first and then embellish ... Set down diligently your thoughts as they rise in the first words that occur ... I have begun a sermon after dinner and sent it off by the post that night."

He was quite as able to be terse and memorable when in conversation and, like Oscar Wilde (who was, like him, disconcertingly vast when seen at close quarters), seems seldom to have been off duty when it came to the epigrammatic and aphoristic. The urge felt by so many of Johnson's contemporaries—not James Boswell alone—to keep a record of his doings and utterances has placed him among the first figures in history whom we feel we "know" as a person. Indeed, so well are even his tics and mannerisms and symptoms conveyed that Martin can confidently say that Johnson more probably suffered from

emphysema than asthma, and Oliver Sacks was able some years ago to make a fairly definite retrospective diagnosis of Tourette's syndrome.

And yet for all this, we know barely enough to know what we don't know. In the last days of his life, in the mean little court off Fleet Street where he made his dwelling, Johnson staged a mock-

ery of the disclosure industry that is associated with that address, and heaped up a huge pyre of his papers, diaries, manuscripts, and letters. With his loyal black servant, Frank Barber, serving as counter-amanuensis, he spent a week at the task of self-immolation. Had it not been for Boswell's retention of some of their mutual correspondence, and Johnson's own (and

presumably significant) inability to burn the letters of Mrs. Hester Thrale, we might have lost the whole trove.

But if it comes to that, we might very nearly never have heard of Samuel Johnson of Lichfield in the first place. Having almost expired in childbirth (and having thus been hastily baptized to save his immortal soul), the little boy fell victim to scrofula and was stricken partially blind and deaf. In those days the remedy for scrofula—also known as "the King's Evil"—was to be magically "touched" by the hereditary monarch. Young Samuel was taken to be touched by Queen Anne, and if the charm did not "take" in his case, well, then, it could be because there had been a disturbance in the legitimacy of the line after the Jacobite convulsions. Johnson thus operates in that extended period of English (and American) history when the divine right of kings is not yet quite exhausted or discredited but when the concept of "the rights of man" has yet to be fully born. Considering how nearly he was extinguished before he could play any part in this great argument, it is perhaps surprising how little he esteemed Thomas Gray, author of the greatest elegy for the unsung.

Martin pursues the argument, about the relationship of health to personality,

We owe Johnson's triumphs to the struggle against anomie, and against the hell of despair to which anomie can be the antechamber.

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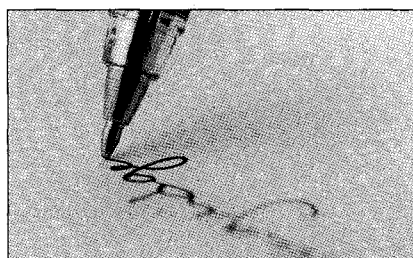
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Dr. Brooks Landon is a Professor of English and Collegiate Fellow at The University of Iowa and Director of The University of Iowa General Education Literature Program. From 1999 to 2005, Professor Landon was chair of the Iowa English Department. He received his Ph.D. from The University of Texas at Austin.

Among Professor Landon's numerous awards and accolades are a University of Iowa M.L. Huit Teaching Award and an International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts Distinguished Scholarship.

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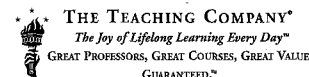
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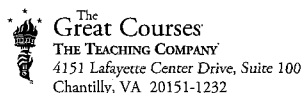


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beyond the physical and well into the psychological. In his view, Johnson felt permanently hag-ridden by guilt, by fear of divine punishment, by self-loathing at his own laziness and greed and inadequacy, and also (this being my own interpretation of the case as presented) by his very failure to feel that guilt and fear strongly enough. His conscious mind, in other words, was at war with his superstitious instincts. His main mental weapon in this combat was his own industry. Sometimes even this industry took its contradictory forms—the only time Johnson ever got up early to read a book, it was Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*—but we owe his triumphs of spoof-parliamentary reportage, his *Rasselas*, and above all his immortal dictionary to the struggle against anomie, and against the hell of despair to which anomie can be the antechamber.

This in turn means that we are very much indebted to Mrs. Thrale, who in 1766 rescued him from that pit, nursed him back from a near-complete breakdown, and for the next 16 years gave him a refuge in south London from the quotidian melancholies of his working life. The other members of his ever-famous "Club"—Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith, Edward Gibbon, and David Garrick—also had an alternative place of resort from their customary Soho haunt. Johnson's dependence on Mrs. Thrale was in some ways so utter and complete that it has given rise to speculations about literal masochism and its sadistic counterpart. In an essay published 60 years ago, Katharine Balderston claimed to have identified a recurrent motif of manacled and beating, begged for by Johnson and duly administered by his mother substitute. Walter Jackson Bate later argued—successfully, I think—that the same letters between them could have contained their private code for the understanding and treatment of incipient madness. More recently, Jeffrey Meyers has revived the Balderston speculation (because, after all, Johnson *did* give Mrs. Thrale a padlock, which she preserved), while Peter Martin follows Bate in identifying Johnson's obsessions about enchainment with the fear of that epoch's cruel treatment of the insane. For myself, I think that

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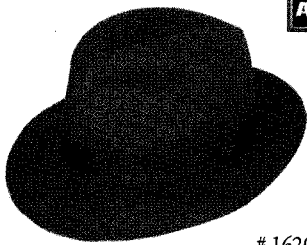
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the evidence most often adduced in favor of the hypothesis is the most persuasive testimony for the other side of the case. In her *Thraliana*, Mrs. Thrale recounts:

Says Johnson a Woman has *such* power between the Ages of twenty five and forty five, that She may tye a Man to a post and whip him if She will.

It's not at all hard to imagine Johnson saying this, but when Mrs. Thrale adds her own footnote to tell us, "This he knew of him self was *literally* and *strictly* true I am sure," why, then, sir and ma'am, I think we may take it as obvious that whoever was plying the lash, if indeed a lash was ever "literally" applied, it was certainly not the respectable lady who wrote those disarmingly ingenuous words.

It was, though, some harsh breed of the "black dog" that helped condition the two constants in Johnson's life and writing: his Toryism and his religion. Martin makes some pleas in mitigation as regards the Toryism, reminding us of Johnson's sympathy for the poor and the failed and the deformed, but he cannot keep the jury out for very long. Johnson's pitiless and violent hatred of the American Revolution, and his contemptuous cruelty toward those who apostatized from the established church (even if it was to join another Christian sect) was strong and consistent. The word *established* may well be the key one here, religion for Johnson being more a matter of security and stability (public as well as private) than a matter of faith, and the episcopal system a further insurance against the fearful "sedition," which he regarded as the twin of John Wilkes's "impiety."

Just as it was a primitive fear of hell that caused his parents to baptize him at birth lest his infant soul be consigned to the fire, so it was increasingly a holy terror that came to dominate his last years. As Macaulay was later to write, about the great man's ghastly tendency to superstition: "He began to be credulous precisely at the point where the most credulous people begin to be sceptical." Again, I see no reason to attribute this fixation upon eternal torture to any masochistic tendency. Johnson felt, as many fine writers have done, that he had wasted most of his time and

squandered the greater part of his gift. (Exorbitant praise from others, such as Boswell in this instance, may often have the effect only of reinforcing such a morbid conviction of failure.) Yet it is owing to Boswell's generosity and curiosity that we have, and from the very same witness, an account of the deathbeds of both David Hume and Samuel Johnson. Hume—who lay dying in the days of 1776 that launched the American Revolution so much hated by Johnson—famously told Boswell that he was no more afraid of his own extinction after death than he was of the nonexistence that had preceded his birth. Johnson, when informed of this calm attitude, declined to credit it—I am going here by Hesketh Pearson's account—and would not listen even when Boswell reminded him that many Greek and Roman heroes had faced death stoically without the benefits of Christianity. At a subsequent meeting with Adam Smith, who vouched for the truth of Boswell's story, Johnson loudly called Smith a liar, to which Smith coldly responded that Johnson was "a son of a bitch." This collision with the author of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* seems to prepare one for Macaulay's later observation that Johnson "could discern clearly enough the folly and meanness of all bigotry but his own."

It occurs to me that both Hume and Smith were Scots (or "Scotchmen," as Johnson preferred to say) and that dislike for the North British was perhaps the one thing that Johnson had in common with his unscrupulous enemy Wilkes. Should you choose to look up any of Johnson's celebrated jokes at the expense of Scotland, whether in his dictionary or his reported speech, you will, I believe, notice that they fall short of the Wildean in being too long-winded and contrived, and too reliant for their leaden effect on mere prejudice. Teasing is very often a sign of inner misery: Johnson's grandeur is diminished the more we come to know of the well-earned honor and eminence of some of those with whom he did battle, as well as the sheer paltriness of some of the imaginary demons with which he merely fancied himself doing so. ■

Christopher Hitchens is an Atlantic contributing editor and a Vanity Fair columnist.

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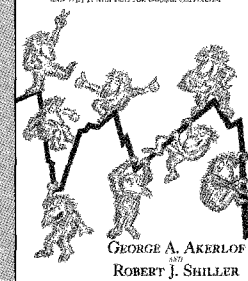
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Fallen Giants: A History of Himalayan Mountaineering From the Age of Empire to the Age of Extremes

Maurice Isserman and Stewart Weaver
YALE

Because It's STILL There might well have been the working title of this comprehensive account, a vacuum-filling history (the first of its kind in five-plus decades) and an enormously engaging addition to the climbing-lit canon. Charting the triumphant rises and disastrous falls of mountaineers well known (Hillary, Mallory, Conway) and otherwise, from 1892 to the present, Isserman and Weaver—history professors and climbing enthusiasts both—simultaneously describe a parabolic parallel. Taking a long view of the pursuit and its memes, they argue that in the Himalayas, the “expeditionary culture of the age of empire ... fostered colonial arrogance and quasi-military hubris,” yet it also “nurtured some genuinely admirable qualities, including a strong sense of fellowship and responsibility to others in the pursuit of common goals in the face of danger.” Today, they contend, those qualities have

been eclipsed “by the hypertrophied commercial individualism of the age of extremes”—as high-altitude adventure has become high-tech, it has become compromised, disputatious, even nihilistic. The “brotherhood of the rope” has frayed, perhaps irreparably. Filled to bursting with lively accounts, prodigious research, and a welcome dash of dry humor, this essential volume makes clear that the saga of mountaineering is, as the authors say, “more than the record of ‘one damn peak after another.’”

Northern Arts: The Breakthrough of Scandinavian Literature and Art, From Ibsen to Bergman

Arnold Weinstein
PRINCETON

This weighty, detailed, and authoritative but lively tome elucidates the revolution Scandinavia wrought in the world of arts and letters beginning in the 19th century. From the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who was such an influence on 20th-century existentialism, to the groundbreaking dramatists, the Swede August Strindberg and the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen,

and the latter’s compatriot, painter Edvard Munch, these Scandinavians broke boundaries and overturned conventional standards and values. In the 20th century, Ingmar Bergman’s films and Astrid Lindgren’s children’s literature continued the tradition of the region’s exceptionalism and iconoclasm. Weinstein’s is a brilliantly told story of how an underpopulated region developed from repressive backwater to cutting-edge artistic fulcrum.

Victor Fleming: An American Movie Master Michael Sragow

PANTHEON

A larger-than-life golden-era Hollywood figure largely ignored or forgotten by modern critics, historians, and filmgoers, Fleming—best known today as the (replacement) director of *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With the Wind*—here receives his long-overdue hagiography. Among the industry’s truly protean figures, he ably filmed every type of genre picture imaginable; weathered several epochal shifts in moviemaking technique (example: with the talkie ascendant, he effortlessly transformed from zealous location realist into sound-stage artifice reveler); and helped shape the screen personas of Gable, Cooper, Tracy, and Fairbanks (and swell the bosoms of Shearer, Bow, Bergman, and Velez). Add to this an Alger-cum-Hemingway arc of virile self-possession—hardscrabble origins, early apprenticeships to Allan Dwan and D. W. Griffith, “friend to explorers, naturalists, race-car drivers, aviators, inventors, and hunters,” onscreen personification via characters’ “brusque authority, technical savvy, rough-edged humor, and lodestone sexuality”—and one might be excused for wondering how such a figure has escaped canonical notice. A fair question, and one that Sragow, a highly astute film critic of the Kael school, rightly asks but only partly answers (“He left no paper trail of letters or diaries, and he died [in 1949] before directors had become national celebrities and objects of idolatry”), concluding that Fleming’s chameleonic

RACHEL ANN LINDSAY

artistry was most responsible for his lasting auteuristic anonymity. No matter: accomplishing prodigious research and writing with an elegant vim befitting his "Old-Time Wild Man" subject, Sragow exhumes an obscured life and explicates an enduring oeuvre.

Sounds of Change: A History of FM Broadcasting in America

Christopher H. Sterling
and Michael C. Keith

NORTH CAROLINA

A crucial step in broadcasting's fitful march toward tomorrow, FM radio gets its historical due in this thoroughly researched, reasonably readable account. Media professors and prolific authors Sterling and Keith trace the technology's slow but steady rise—beginning with Edwin Armstrong's momentous wideband invention—to respect, profit, and ubiquity. Though FM's initial decades were marked by subservience and perceived inferiority to AM, an eventual admixture of adventurous programming, superior signal strength, and paradigmatic FCC regulations conspired to bring FM technology to the radio forefront. Although the historical erudition here is ample and evident, the just-plain-curious reader might fairly howl over the mere handful of pages allotted to FM's putative (counter)cultural influence. Rock and other sounds welling up from the '60s underground merit cursory mention; few colorful on-air personalities emerge; when a note of genuine eclecticism sounds, it's soon muffled by measured factual recitals. (Also assessed too sparingly: the role of public-radio news and programming in the decades-long drama.) Sterling and Keith are more effective in the book's latter chapters, where they intelligently consider FM's present and future. Here they identify problems both internal (a paucity of variety, an excess of advertising) and external (digital radio's imperious, likely inevitable encroachment), allowing FM's story to date—a distinctly American tale of art, science, business, and ingenuity—to conclude satisfyingly, loud and clear.

Emily Post: Daughter of the Gilded Age, Mistress of American Manners

Laura Claridge

RANDOM HOUSE

"What would Emily say?" was the question asked by generations of Americans who grew up looking to Emily Post for answers in matters of manners and morals. It would be easy to stereotype Post—she *did* focus on details, such as how to fold a napkin, that, when facing a world war, seem trivial. Instead, Claridge's biography explains the complications of being Emily Post—a woman many considered the most influential of the first half of the 20th century, after Eleanor Roosevelt. The book spans Post's 88 years, but opens more as an absorbing biography of the Gilded Age than of the main character. Emily's family worked its way into the upper crust, and she married into blue blood. But in high society, manners were not always good and morals were often enough despicable. Post experienced this unlovely combination during an embarrassingly public divorce from her philandering husband. At 34, when she became a single mother of two, she was in charge of her own life for the first time. Driven, Claridge posits, by a fierce need to be emotionally (and to a degree fiscally) self-sustaining, Post began her career as a writer. This is where the book turns into a careful and personal biography—as personal as possible with a main character who rarely revealed an emotional side. As life delivered its tragedies—divorce; the loss of her father to cancer; her mother's death in a gruesome accident; the death of her adult son—Post seemed to retreat more and more into writing (she oversaw 10 revised editions of her authoritative tome, *Etiquette*, updating the book and her own attitude to the changing times), and her advice-giving radio shows. Although somewhat repetitious, this book is a sympathetic portrait of a woman who transcended the parochialism of her class—a woman who grew to believe that the Best People weren't born, they were made. **A**

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IN A WORD

By Barbara Wallraff

SOMETHING I'VE ALWAYS loved about foreign travel is that every product package, shop sign, radio program, and menu is also a language lesson. Just go about your business and the language will teach itself to you. This isn't so different from the way infants learn to speak. It's not as systematic as signing up for French 101—but since time out of mind, it has done the job.

Foreign languages, like fancy French cheeses and paella and prosciutto, are increasingly available here at home. For instance, whenever I feed my cat treats—she likes Whiskas, made by the Mars company—the packet offers me a French lesson: “*Une gâterie irrésistible au centre mou, croquante à l'extérieur et tout simplement sublime.*” (Even in a language one doesn't speak, marketing hype is unmistakable, no?)

I've learned from my clothes how to say “Hand wash separately in cold water” in French and Spanish—even if I do ignore the message in all three languages and toss the garment into the washing machine. I've picked up “Please recycle” in Italian from my hair-conditioner jar. Stuff that comes with an instruction manual is the best. My new Miele vacuum cleaner's “turbo-brush,” for example, offers an ambitious comparative-languages program—in 13 languages, even unto Finnish and Greek. (Or if you treat British and American English as separate languages, the way Miele does, that makes 14.)

If I'd been born in, say, Denmark or Fiji, I would have grown up thinking it was normal to be fluent in more than one language. But to many of us native-born Americans, the ability to speak something besides English remains as exotic as drinking aquavit or kava. This just has to put us at a disadvantage. I'm not happy about many consequences of globalization. But I'm delighted by the globalization of the print around my house.



WORD FUGITIVES

THOSE THOUGHTLESS FOLKS who stop dead at the top of an escalator or walk four abreast on a busy sidewalk? Recently, Word Fugitives sought a name for them—and sorry, everybody who wanted to call them *tourists*, that's unfair. If you haven't noticed, locals can be clueless too. Geoff Webb, who submitted his suggestion as a comment on my blog, came closer to the mark with *detourist*.

Linda Jones Clough, of Costa Mesa, Calif., wrote to report that her father, the late animator and cartoonist Chuck Jones, referred to the people in question as the *Anti-Destination League*, and she included a link to a 20-year-old *New York Times* interview with Jones, conducted in a stretch limo caught in a traffic jam, in which he said, “You never heard of them? Well, they're all over the place ... Their job is to keep you from getting where you're going.”

The coinage *obliviots* had its partisans. *Impedestrians* was another popular suggestion. Carl Holzman, of Chicago, gave this idea a twist, proposing

impudestrians, and Cathy McNally twisted it differently in a blog comment, with *bipediments*. Readers whose minds headed off in unique directions include Steve Garnaas-Holmes, of Concord, N.H., with *sidewoxen*; Kathleen DeBold, of Burtonsville, Md., with *ignoraim-leses*; and Amy M., another blog commenter, with *in-the-wayfarers*.

Top honors, though, go to blog commenter Hank Horsey, for his showstopper of a coinage, *speed bumpkin*.

NOW DAVID K. PRINCE, of Lansdowne, Pa., writes, “Often my wife and I will decide to watch a DVD, and then she will delay coming to sit down, thereby subjecting me to the repeat-loop sounds and visuals of the DVD's main menu. What's the word or phrase for this interminable experience?” ■

Visit Barbara Wallraff's blog, at barbarawallraff.theatlantic.com, to see more commentary on language and to submit Word Fugitive queries and words that meet David K. Prince's need. Readers whose queries are published and those who take top honors will receive an autographed copy of Wallraff's most recent book, *Word Fugitives*.

PETER ARKLE

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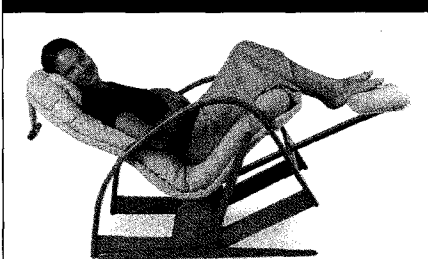
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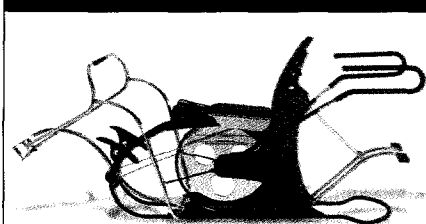
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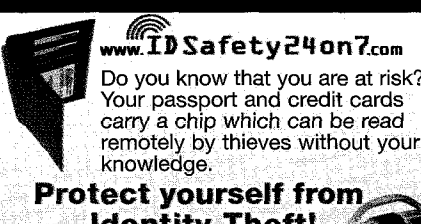
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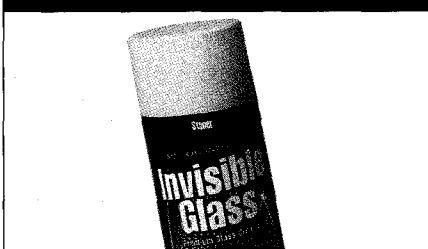
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WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

By Jeffrey Goldberg



My friends call me “Dorian Gray” because I don’t seem to age. I’m 63, but I tend to attract men in their mid-to-late 40s or early 50s. I believe in “truth in packaging,” and anyway, I don’t believe that such an age gap bodes well for a long-term relationship. So on the first date, or first encounter, I bluntly tell potential swains that I’m too old for them. If they ask my age, I tell them the truth. This is an ethical necessity, right? Or is it their problem to figure it out? What do you suggest?

Anne, Monroe, N.Y.

Dear Anne,

I fear that you might be pulling my leg here. I’m not acquainted with too many 45-year-old men who are wildly stimulated by 63-year-old women. Then again, perhaps you are uncommonly hot. I mean, hot-like-Sarah-Palin-except-even-older-plus-you-read-*The Atlantic* hot. (*The Atlantic* is very sexy, by the way; in Asia, copies of *The Atlantic* are ground into paste and used as an aphrodisiac.) Assuming your “problem” is real, why not go out on a date without worrying about long-term prospects? Unless, in addition to being superhot, you are obstetrically exceptional.

Is life after college really as monotonous and depressing as it looks?

Ben, Manhattan, Kan.

Dear Ben,

No. It’s worse! Just kidding. It’s actually a joy. Except for the prostate exams.

I have just realized fully, after seven years, that I am married to a racist. He’s used the “N word” a number of times over the years, and we always fought about it. But he has always claimed to be directing the slur toward somebody “acting” like one, and not toward people of color generally. Well, I recently learned how he truly feels. He voted for McCain and I voted for Obama. He said, “Looks like we have an ‘N’ for president.” I was saddened and disgusted by his remark. I don’t believe I can live with anyone who thinks like this, and I’m planning to get a divorce. This is not the only reason, but it’s certainly the icing on the cake. Do you think we can change racists’ minds?

Name withheld, Virginia Beach, Va.

Dear Mildred (may I call you Mildred?),

I don’t mean to sound harsh, but wasn’t the first, or second, deployment of the N word enough to convince you that something was desperately wrong

with your husband’s moral wiring? I know: it’s often very hard to see what’s right before your eyes, so I congratulate you for realizing, even belatedly, the depth of your problem, and I wish you luck on your extraction. To answer your deeper question with a question: Why try to change their minds at all? Racism isn’t a burden for us; it’s a burden for racists. In any case, trying to bring a racist to civilization is like trying to teach a dog to sing Verdi.

I’ve always felt that my sense of humor has suffered because I’m not part of an inherently funny ethnic or religious group. My best friend is Jewish and Italian (a veritable font of humor), and my wife is Catholic (also good for laughs). But I was raised Presbyterian. How do I mine my psyche for better party repartee?

Kevin, Williamsville, N.Y.

Dear Kevin,

The idea that Presbyterians are not funny is a calumny propagated by Episcopalians, who are jealous of your dancing abilities. Just study this list of successful Presbyterian comics: David Letterman ... David Letterman. It’s true that genetic memories of pogroms, or the Middle Passage, or at the very least the Bourbon occupation of Sicily provide a crucial spark of humor. But it’s not true that Presbyterians are naturally unfunny. Here is one famous Presbyterian joke:

A Presbyterian husband makes love to his Presbyterian wife. After finishing, the husband asks, “I’m sorry, dearest, did I hurt you?” The wife responds, “No, dear, why do you ask?” The husband answers, “Because you moved.”

For further proof of wicked Presbyterian humor, I refer you to the limericks that begin, “There once was a man from Nantucket,” which I believe were written by Presbyterians. Or possibly by dirty-minded Congregationalists. ■

To submit your question or request for advice, please e-mail advice@theatlantic.com. Include your full name and address.

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